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Truth and grace; or, The works of Mary Jane Graham

Rev: Dr. Miller

with respects of the Editors

Mrs. Mary Jane Graham.

TRUTH AND GRACE;

OR,

THE WORKS OF MARY JANE GRAHAM.

With a Memoir.

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PREFACE.

THE author of the following pages departed to her heavenly rest more than a generation since, and her little volumes, passing through several editions, have been highly prized and useful to great numbers of the Lord's people, down to the present time.

Of late years, however, they have in a measure passed out of circulation, though never more needed or adapted to be useful; and it has been deemed a wise and timely service to the cause of Christ to bring them again before the church and the public.

In the present issue the two volumes are combined in one of moderate size and cost, without abridgment, except the omitting of a few lines relating exclusively to the Church of England, and having no relevancy or importance in this country.

A short memoir has also been prefixed, taken from the larger and valuable work of the Rev. Charles Brydges.

The blessing of God is humbly invoked on this effort, put forth in faith that he will accept and use the book for time to come in accomplishing still wider good to souls and greater glory to his holy name.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

MEMOIR OF MISS MARY JANE GRAHAM 9

THE TEST OF TRUTH, PART I..... 57

THE TEST OF TRUTH, PART II.....100

THE FREENESS OF GRACE.

ORIGINAL SIN 157

FREE GRACE.....171

ELECTING GRACE 201

MEMOIR.

A MEMOIR

OF

MISS MARY JANE GRAHAM.

Mary Jane Graham was born in London, April 11, 1803. Her father was engaged in a respectable business, from which he retired a few years before his daughter's death (and chiefly from regard to her delicate health), to the village of Stoke-Fleming, near Dartmouth, Devon. She appears to have been the subject of early religious convictions. At the age of seven she had acquired those habits of secret prayer, which may be considered a favourable mark of Divine influence upon her soul. But we will give the history of this era of her life in her own words. To a friend, who had evinced some incredulity of the genuineness or permanency of early impressions of religion, she thus writes.

"March 20, 1827.

"You appear, my dear friend, to think very early piety too wonderful a thing to be true. It is wonderful,—so wonderful that, when David was con-

templating the starry firmament, he was drawn for a moment from his meditation on the wonders he there beheld, by the still greater wonder of 'God's ordaining strength out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.'[1] But David's wonder and yours were of a very different nature—he wondered and adored. Jesus too—that 'man of sorrows'—once 'rejoiced in spirit,' because God 'had hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.'[2] 'Even so, Lord Jesus; in thy rejoicing will I too rejoice; let the world think me a fool or an enthusiast, or beside myself, as they thought thee.' The story of 'Little Henry and his Bearer,' to which I believe you allude, I have been assured by Miss ——, is every word of it true. Do not then bring upon yourself the dreadful sin of limiting the power of the Holy One of Israel. Jesus has said, 'Suffer little children to come;'[3] and they will come, if he calls them. As facts are the strongest of all proofs, bear with me a little longer, while I tell you briefly the history of a child, for the truth of which I can vouch. I knew a little girl, about sixteen years and a half ago. She was much like other children, as full of sin and vanity as ever she could hold; and her parents had not as yet taken much pains to talk to her about religion. So she

[1] Psalm viii. 1–4.

[2] Luke x. 21. This, though not the direct, is an inclusive meaning of the declaration.

[3] Mark x. 14.

went on in the way of her own evil heart, and thought herself a very good little girl, because she said her prayers every night and morning, and was not more passionate, wilful, and perverse than most of her young companions. The God of love did not think this sinful child too young to learn of Jesus. He so ordered it about the time I am speaking of, when she was just seven years old, that she was led by a pious servant into some almshouses belonging to Rowland Hill, who had just been preaching at them. The servant and an aged woman entered into a long conversation together, to which the little girl listened, and wondered what could make them like to talk about such things. But at the close of it, the old woman took the child affectionately by the hand, and said to her, 'My dear child, make the Lord Jesus your friend now that you are so young; and when you come to be as old as I am, he'll never leave you nor forsake you.' God the Spirit sent these simple words to the poor simple child's heart. She walked home in silence by her nurse's side, thinking how she could get Jesus to be her friend. Then she remembered how often she had slighted this dear Saviour; how she had read of him in the Bible, and been wearied of the subject; how she had heard the minister preach Jesus, and wished the long dry sermon over; how she had said prayers to him without minding what she said; how she had passed days, weeks, and months without thinking of him; how she had loved her play, her books, and her

toys, and her playfellows,—all, all better than Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit convinced her of sin. She saw that no one good thing dwelt in her, and that she deserved to be cast away from God forever. Would Jesus love her now? Would he ever forgive her? She feared not; but she would try. She would make herself very good, and then, perhaps, Jesus would be her friend. But the more this little girl tried to be good, the more her naughty heart got the better of her; for she was trying in her own strength. She was led to give up trying in that way; and many long nights did she spend in praying 'with strong crying and tears' to Jesus, that he would teach her how to get her sins pardoned, and make her fit to have him for her friend. Let me mention it for the encouragement of those who seek Jesus, that he did not disdain to listen to the prayers of this little child. He put it into her heart to read the Bible, of which, though she understood not all, yet she gathered enough to give her some comfort. One day her attention was fixed on these words:—'The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'[1] Now, something that could take away sin was just what this little girl wanted; and she asked her father to tell her who this Lamb of God was. He explained the precious verse. But who can describe the raptures which filled the bosom of this little child, when made to comprehend that the 'blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin'!

[1] John i. 29.

Now she fled to Jesus indeed; now she knew that he had loved her, and given himself for her; now the Spirit of God, who often 'chooseth the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty,'[1] 'shed abroad the love of God in the heart'[2] of a weak and foolish child, and 'filled her with peace and joy in believing.'[3] She had no one whom she could talk to of these things. But she held sweet converse with her reconciled God and Father; and gladly would she have quitted this life to go and dwell with Jesus. Since then she has spent nearly seventeen years of mingled happiness and pain. But she has had Jesus for her friend; and he never has, and never will, forsake her.[4] She has forsaken him more than once for a season, and turned to follow the vain things of the world. But her Shepherd's eye has been over her in her wanderings, and he has never suffered her *quite* to depart from him. To this day her vain and treacherous heart is continually leading her to provoke her heavenly Friend. He 'visits her transgressions with the rod, and her iniquity with stripes;' but he has sworn 'never to take his loving-kindness from her, nor to suffer his faithfulness to fail.'[5] She is constrained to acknowledge that during all this time she has never done one thing that could merit God's favour. Free grace, free mercy, are all her song: 'It is of the Lord's

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[1] 1 Cor. i. 27. [2] Rom. v. 5. [3] Rom. xv. 13.
[4] Heb. xiii. 5. [5] Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33.

mercy she has not long ago been consumed.'[1] She is quite sure she could never have changed her own heart. No; God has begun the good work in her, and he must carry it on; and from first to last, let glory be ascribed to him, and let her take shame and confusion to herself. At this moment she desires to live, if she may be made the means of converting one sinner to Jesus; but if not, she would rather 'depart and be with Christ, which is far better.' She is far from despising earthly blessings. Every morsel she puts into her mouth, the very air she breathes, is made sweet and refreshing by the loving hand that sends it. Once there was a curse on all her earthly blessings. But now 'Christ hath redeemed her from the curse of the law, being made a curse for her.'[2] She would give it as her living experience, and leave it when she goes hence as her dying testimony, that there is nothing worth living for except to know him, and see others come to him and wash their guilty souls in the blood of the Lamb. God has given her the blessing of seeing a happy change take place in some of the dear companions of her childhood and youth. She waits upon him for the salvation of the rest; and there is no one, whom she longs after more ardently in the Lord, than that dear and valued friend of her earliest days, to whom this letter is addressed, and to whom she wishes every spiritual blessing, that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy

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[1] Lam. iii. 22. [2] Gal. iii. 13.

Ghost, can bestow, now and for evermore! Amen, and Amen."

Some apparent discrepancy may be observed between this exquisitely beautiful and natural letter, and her published account of this important crisis.[1] Her apprehensions of Divine truth, as expressed in her letter, were indeed clear and enlivening far beyond the average spiritual capacity of children. Yet her "view of many of the doctrines of Christianity," which she afterwards so fully developed and so richly enjoyed, were at this time "very indistinct." Doubtless also much of natural feeling and excitement was mingled with these early impressions of religion; while what was of a spiritual character, as she afterwards discovered, was not sufficiently grounded upon that sense of universal guilt and helplessness which prostrates the sinner at the foot of the cross, simply dependent upon a free salvation. This superficial cast of impression—*without invalidating the reality of a Divine change*—will account for the instability which marked her early course in the ways of God. From her own history we learn that she "was enabled to walk with God in sincerity and without any considerable declension during the greater part of her childhood, and the commencement of a riper age." After this period, however, "more than once," as her letter informs us, she "forsook" her heavenly Friend, "turned to follow the vain things of the world," and

[1] Test of Truth.

"went on frowardly in the way of her own heart"—"leaning to her own understanding," and led captive in her own folly.

Of this period future notice will be given. Meanwhile we revert to her early years as spent under the roof of her parents or at school. Her parents considered her virtues as those *of every day*—that is, habitual—and not merely called forth on particular occasions. She was a most amiable, affectionate, and dutiful child, seldom needing correction, tender-hearted when told of her faults, and by her general kindness of disposition attaching all the members of the household to herself. She was remarkably free from selfishness; always ready to yield to her companions, even to deprive herself of what she valued. Her little pocket-money was generally reserved for some object of distress, or for some token of affection to a friend.

Her quickness of mind was a subject of early observation. Her reading was chiefly obtained by attending to the lessons which were given to her brother then preparing for school. She was seldom seen without a book in her hand, and seemed never so happy as when employing herself in the improvement of her mind. Yet this thoughtful cast of character was by no means tinged with unnatural gloom. In all the harmless games of childhood none of her companions excelled her in playful activity;[1]

[1] One of her early friends, however, remarks that her games and manner of amusing partook more of imagination and of genius than those of the generality of children.

while in the midst of her cheerful temperament, it was abundantly evident that the main concern of religion was uppermost in her mind. "I recollect," —her cousin writes,—"that when we were quite little children, she made some attempt to talk to me about religion—once especially, when we were sitting behind the curtain in the drawing-room at ——. I did not like the subject, and therefore walked away and joined my more worldly-minded companions."

Her school career commenced soon after she was seven years old. She was, however, shortly removed, from ill health, and again, about the age of ten, sent to a school of a different kind. Many of her companions, who survive her, will probably long preserve the remembrance of that peculiar kindness and gentleness of spirit, which combined with her superior powers. One of them remarks her great carefulness to screen, as far as it was lawful to do so, the faults of her fellows, and her anxiety to plead for them when in disgrace; and so powerful was her advocacy, that her preceptress was constrained to remove out of her way, when her judgment compelled her to persevere in her discipline. In all the school difficulties, she was a constant resource, ever ready and willing to assist, without any assumption upon the ground of her acknowledged superiority. One trait of peculiar loveliness was here exhibited (the spirit of which was marked on various occasions in after-life), in her consideration of any of her companions who from any unfavourable causes might appear to be neglected. These

were the objects of her particular notice, and with them she shared all her little indulgences.

Her religious impressions appear to have been cherished by the familiar exhortations of the husband of her preceptress, and by devotional exercises with those of her companions, who were living under the practical influence of their Christian instruction. To one of them she proposed to learn every day a portion of Scripture in private, and to repeat it to each other when they retired to rest. At this time she committed to memory the whole of the prophecy of Isaiah, besides other portions of the sacred volume.

At the age of twelve her delicate health again occasioned her removal from school. Her illness lasted for about two months, during which time, when confined upon the sofa, she committed to memory the whole book of Psalms. Indeed, her powers of memory were of an extraordinary order. She was much delighted with Milton's Paradise Lost, and had learned the greater part, if not the whole, of that magnificent poem. For many successive mornings she repeated to her father most correctly upwards of three hundred lines each morning. Upon her recovery from illness she passed several months with a careful servant by the seaside. So instinctive were her habits of active usefulness, that she employed herself, though only in her thirteenth year, in collecting a few children for the purpose of instruction, and in distributing tracts. In returning home to her parents, she en-

joyed with them the rich and responsible privilege of the ministry of the late Rev. Samuel Crowther, Vicar of Christ Church, Newgate Street,—an eminent "watchman of Ephraim," now with his God.[1] Under his faithful and affectionate instruction she was brought to the ordinance of Confirmation about the age of sixteen, and publicly "joined herself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten."[2]

About the age of seventeen, Miss Graham's mind underwent a most extraordinary revolution. She fell, for a few months, from the heavenly atmosphere of communion with God, into the dark and dreary regions of infidelity. Allusion has already been made to this afflicting circumstance, in her letter.[3] But for a most interesting and graphic detail, the reader must be referred to her own published account;[4] some digest of which will here be given, in order to connect the thread of her history, and to exhibit a clear view of one of the most important eras in her life.

Miss Graham's mind opened in a metaphysical form,—unfavourable to a simple reception of truth. And this, connected with a defective apprehension of her lost estate, induced a spirit of self-de-

[1] Hos. ix. 8. [2] Jer. l. 5.

[3] "*She had forsaken him more than once*,"—evidently includes a reference to this history. In the recollection, however, of her complete restoration, she added,—"He has never suffered her *quite*" (i. e. *altogether and finally*) "to depart from him."

[4] Test of Truth.

pendence,—one of the most subtle and successful hindrances to the Christian life.[1] Thus was the way opened to a secret habit of backsliding from God. The foolish vanities of the world for a while captivated her heart; and her manners were remarked to be like those of other thoughtless girls of her own age. From frivolity she sought refuge in her more solid intellectual pursuits. All sources of self-gratification within her power were resorted to with the fruitless attempt of obtaining peace in a course of departure from God. Wearied at length with disappointment, this prodigal child "began to be in want;" and many a wishful eye did she cast towards the rich provision of her Father's forsaken house.[2] In turning, however, to religion for comfort, she found, to use her own words,—"Alas! I had no religion: I had refused to give glory to the Lord my God; now my feet were left to stumble upon the dark mountains."[3]

The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ had often

[1] She alludes to an injury which her own mind, in common (as she conceives) with many others, had received from adopting Doddridge's form of covenanting with God. (Rise and Progress, chapter xvii.) This was in her thirteenth year. Let it, however, be remembered, that, though this mode of dedication may have frequently ministered to a legal spirit, yet it by no means necessarily partakes of an unevangelical character. This "subscribing of the hand unto the Lord" has been found by many eminent Christians (as, for example, in Philip Henry's family) to be a cord of love, not a yoke of bondage. Allusion is probably made to it as an acceptable ordinance in the service of the gospel, Isaiah xliv. 3–5.

[2] Luke xv. 14, 17.

[3] Test of Truth.

been to her (as to many other minds cast into the same mould) an occasion of perplexity. Now it was "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." Though repeated examination had fully satisfied her that it was *the truth of the Bible*, yet so repulsive was it to her proud heart, that she was led from thence *to question the truth of the Bible itself.* "I suspected"—said she—"that a system of religion which involved such apparent absurdities, could not possibly come from God. Determining to sift the matter to the utmost, I eagerly acquainted myself with the arguments for and against Christianity. *My understanding was convinced that the Scriptures were Divine. But my heart refused to receive the conviction. The more my reason was compelled to assent to their truth, the more I secretly disliked the doctrines of the Bible.*"[1]

Continued resistance to convictions was the natural and melancholy result of this inquiry. She determined to lay the subject aside for a while, still "persuading herself that there must be flaws in the evidence of so strange a history," which only her want of maturity of judgment prevented her from discovering. Those early religious impressions, that usually form a bulwark against infidelity, in her case proved a stumbling-block to her faith. Ignorant of the native bias of her heart against the gospel, she considered them as the effect of prejudice, before her mind had been intelligently informed or exercised. She now, therefore, deter-

[1] Test of Truth.

mined to burst her chains, and to think and examine for herself.

Hitherto she had confined her perplexities within her own bosom; partly dreading the influence of external bias, and partly fearing to infuse into another's mind doubts concerning a book which, she could not conceal from herself, might after all be true. She endeavoured now to strengthen her mind by pursuing a course of intellectual study, with the direct design of preserving herself from becoming a dupe to "cunningly-devised fables." And here she did not fail subsequently to acknowledge the special forbearance and wisdom of her heavenly Father. Justly might he have deprived her of that reason, which she had so presumptuously set up in his own place. Yet was he pleased to overrule this waywardness of his child as an ultimate means of her restoration, in applying her course of mental discipline to the effectual discovery of the fallacies with which she was now deluded.

The immediate effect, however, of these studies was decidedly injurious. Their absorbing interest diverted her mind from the main subject of inquiry; while they proved also a temporary refuge against the uneasy disturbance of her conscience. Even her intervals of reflection were too easily soothed by the indefinite postponement of the great concern to "a more convenient season." Occasional convictions were indeed felt, but without any permanent or practical influence.

Through the Divine mercy, this state of infatuation did not prove of long duration. After a few months' captivity, she was brought, though not without severe conflict of mind, to the full light and liberty of scriptural truth.[1] The conviction of the being of a God, in her darkest moments had never wholly forsaken her. A few hours' contemplation of the starry heavens darted into her mind a piercing reflection upon her stupidity and ingratitude, in what she justly called an "unnatural and parricidal attempt to banish God from his own creation, to depose him from his natural supremacy over her heart."[2] Her whole life now appeared to her (what indeed the Scriptures declare it to be) one continued act of sin and folly. Her convictions, however, of sin—being wholly unconnected with any discovery of the way of forgiveness—naturally tended to despondency. Every fresh sense of the corruption of her heart and of the unsullied purity of the Divine character, brought with it a corresponding sense of guilt. She could expect, therefore, nothing but punishment proportioned to the infinite sinfulness of her offence. She could not conceive the consistency of her forgiveness with the claim of Divine justice; and the alternative of her eternal punishment seemed even less dreadful than

[1] It may be remarked, that severe providential afflictions about this period concurred with the exercises of her own mind, to awaken her mind to this self-abasing recollection of her fearful departure from God.

[2] Test of Truth. Comp. Rom. i. 20, 21, 28.

the supposition of any inconsistency in Him who, in her view, was the Perfection of Holiness. "I had acquired"—she remarked—"such a perception of the beauty of holiness, that the thought of an unholy God was worse than hell to me. I felt that I had rather God should pour out on me all the vials of his wrath, than that, carried away by an unworthy softness and weakness, he should forgive, and thereby encourage sin. *To undergo eternal punishment was horrible. To acknowledge an unholy God was more horrible.*"[1]

As her last expedient, her despised Bible was brought to mind. And "how different"—she observes—"was the temper of mind, in which I now addressed myself to its perusal, from that in which I had read it in the commencement of my disbelief of Christianity! I was no longer a proud sophist, triumphing in the strength and penetration of human reason, and in the comprehensiveness of human knowledge. The contemplation of my own ignorance, weakness, and wickedness, had laid my pride in the dust. My eyes were opened to view myself as I really was,—depraved and blinded in my reason, judgment, and understanding. *And this is the process which must take place in the soul of every man, before he can pursue the search after truth in a right spirit.*"[2]

Her interest was early directed to the promises of Divine teaching to the sincere inquirer after truth. Their suitableness fixed her attention. Their

[1] Test of Truth. [2] Ibid.

freeness encouraged her heart. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find. He giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him"—especially arrested her.[1] She determined to make trial of them, conceiving that their fulfilment in her own case would be a "*Test of the Truth*" *of the book* which held them forth for her acceptance. Though hindered at first by a sense of unworthiness, she ventured to apply; justly considering, that whatever might be her apprehensions of her own demerit, yet a state of submission and desire could not be so displeasing to God as one of carelessness and rebellion.[2] But the description of this anxious crisis must be given in her own striking words. "Impelled by these reflections—fearful and uncertain, but with uncontrollable, unutterable longings, I directed my applications '*To the unknown God.*' O my Redeemer! the first breathings of my soul were not uttered in thy name! I rushed into the presence of my Judge without a mediator. But doubtless even then thy comeliness was thrown over the deformity of my soul; and the eye of my

[1] Luke xi. 9–11. The drawing out of this argument forms the first part of "The Test of Truth,"—upon which a venerable clergyman remarks, "I hope I have been for many years a suitor for this promise. But I never before felt myself so intelligently encouraged and animated to persist in my humble petition for more and more of Divine knowledge." See also these promises, and the whole subject of "The Test of Truth," powerfully illustrated in the Bishop of Calcutta's Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity,—Lecture XIX.

[2] Test of Truth.

Father beheld me with pity, for thy dear name's sake. My prayer ascended up to heaven, fragrant with the incense of thy merits; though the poor wretch who offered it thought to please God by leaving thee out of it."[1]

In this prostration of soul, she continued "watching daily at her Lord's gates, waiting at the posts of his doors." It need scarcely be added,—she did not seek in vain.[2] The Divine character now appeared before her,—not—as before—in its consuming holiness, but in the combined glory of holiness and love. Her apprehensions of sin, of Christ, and of the whole system of Christian truth, were now irradiated with heavenly light; and with simplicity, and "godly sincerity" of "heart," she was enabled to "believe unto righteousness." The character of Christ, as a proof of the credibility of the Christian revelation, arrested her particular attention. A minute scrutiny of his spotless life was most satisfactory in its result.[3] "The more"—said she—"I studied this Divine character, the more I grew up as it were into its simplicity and holiness,

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[1] Test of Truth. It may be asked, "Where was all that knowledge and faith expressed at her first reception of the gospel?" (See her letter, pp. 9–12.) But, in fact, her infidelity was a black cloud,—intercepting all present apprehensions of faith and intelligence. There are eminent Christians in the church, who have "entered into this cloud," and whose recollections are more or less familiar with this agonizing but triumphant conflict.

[2] See Prov. viii. 34, 35; Isa. lxiv. 5; xlv. 19.

[3] Test of Truth.

the more my understanding was enabled to shake off those slavish and sinful prejudices which had hindered me from appreciating its excellence. Truly his words were dearer to me 'than my necessary food,'—he was my 'All in all.' I did not want to have any knowledge, goodness, or strength, independently of him. I had rather be 'accepted in the Beloved,' than received (had that been possible) upon the score of my own merits. I had rather walk, leaning upon his arm, than have a stock of strength given me to perform the journey alone. To learn, as a fool, of Christ; this was better to me than to have the knowledge of an angel to find out things for myself."[1]

After her recovery from this fearful snare of Satan, she was mercifully preserved from "turning again to folly," and led forth in "the path of the

[1] This is not a solitary instance of impression from the contemplation of the character of Christ. Even Mr. Chubb must have felt some conviction, when he describes his life "as a beautiful picture of human nature in its native purity and simplicity; and showing at once what excellent creatures men would be, when under the influence and power of that gospel which he preached unto them." (True Gospel, p. 56.) Rousseau's exquisite contrast between Socrates and Christ is well known, concluding with the remarkable acknowledgment respecting the latter:—"The inventor of such a personage would be a more astonishing character than the hero." Yet could this man's heart resist the clear conviction of his judgment. "*I cannot*"—he subjoins—"*believe the Gospel.*" His Confessions, however, clearly trace his unbelief to its proper cause,—*the love of sin.* See John iii. 19, 20,—a text which throws more light upon the secret springs of infidelity, than whole volumes that have been written upon the subject.

just,"[1] with increasing light, strength, and establishment. "From that moment"—she adds—"I ceased to stumble at the doctrines of the cross. The doctrines of Scripture, which had before appeared to me an inexplicable mass of confusion and contradictions, were now written on my understanding with the clearness of a sunbeam. Above all, that once abhorred doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was become exceeding precious to me. The external evidences of Christianity, though I now perceived all their force, were no longer necessary to my conviction. From that time"—she concludes—"I have continued to 'sit at the feet of Jesus and to hear his word;' taking him for my Teacher and Guide in things temporal as well as spiritual. He has found in me a disciple so slow of comprehension, so prone to forget his lessons and to act in opposition to his commands, that, were he not infinitely 'meek and lowly in heart,' he would long ago have cast me off in anger. But he still continues to bear with me, and to give me 'line upon line, and precept upon precept.' And I am certain, that he 'will never leave me, nor forsake me;' for, though I am variable and inconstant, 'with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'"[2]

[1] Ps. lxxxv. 8; Prov. iv. 18.

[2] Test of Truth. The extracts given from this interesting little work will be sufficient to commend it to the reader's attention, as the production of an author of no common power, and deeply imbued with the glowing principles of the gospel. It will remind the reader of some of Mr. Scott's painful exercises of mind described in his "Force of Truth," and of the argument so successfully handled by Bishop Burnet in his disputations with Lord Rochester.

Miss Graham continued to reside in London for some time after her deliverance from that awful delusion, into which she had been permitted to fall. The remembrance, however, of this temporary apostasy was "ever before her,"[1] with all that holy shame and self-abasement which attaches to the "purified" conscience of the pardoned sinner,[2]—humbling her in the dust, while yet faith, hope, love, peace, and joy were the dominant principles in her soul. Deeply also did she feel the constraint of the command given by anticipation to a backsliding apostle—"*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*"[3] It was the great object of her "Test of Truth" to set forth her own case as a beacon of warning, an example of encouragement, and a monument of Divine grace, for the special use of those who might be brought into the same seductive atmosphere of temptation. There is reason to believe that her work in its original form produced its measure of conviction upon her principal correspondent; and we may confidently expect, that in a wider circulation, an answer to her prayers for a Divine blessing upon it will be abundantly manifested. During her residence in London, the ministry of the Rev. Watts Wilkinson, and a deep study of the sacred volume, were the ordained means of advancing her knowledge and experience of scriptural truth. Her intellectual habits were a source of much gratification to her, and mainly contributed, under the blessing of God, to form her cha-

[1] Psalm li. 3. [2] Ezek. xvi. 63. [3] Luke xxii. 32.

racter into a mould of solid and permanent usefulness. It is, however, delightful to observe her Christian simplicity and watchfulness to subordinate these valuable enjoyments to the primary object of the glory of God. Of this the following prayer, found among her papers, will furnish an interesting and edifying illustration.

"Before study of any kind, remember that it is but lost labour, except the Lord bless it.

"SUMMARY OF THINGS TO BE SOUGHT OF GOD BEFORE STUDY.

"I desire to thank thee, my God and Father in Christ Jesus, for this and every other opportunity of improvement thou hast given me. May the opportunity thou hast given me be blest of thee! Enable me to receive it with thanksgiving, and sanctify it to me by the word of God and prayer. O let me know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified; and other things *just so far* as may be for my good and thy glory, *and no further.* I would mourn before thee the base ingratitude, with which I have hitherto abused my time and talents, by loving thy gifts more than thee, and seeking myself, not thee, in them. Now I bring all my things to thee; for they are *not mine, but thine own.* Take that *accursed thing, self, out of them all,* and condescend to use them for thy glory. I thank thee that the meanest employment is acceptable in thy sight, when done in the name of the Lord Jesus. May I set about this, in *his name, and in his*

strength, and to his glory! May I not *once seek my own things in it, but the things that are Jesus Christ's!* Let me no longer lean to my own understanding; but may I so acknowledge thee in all my ways, that thou mayest establish my thoughts, and direct my paths! Suffer me not to be wise in my own conceit, nor vainly puffed up in my fleshly mind. Make me to lean from mine own wisdom. Be thou my wisdom.

"Holy Lord God the Spirit! who dividest unto every man severally as thou wilt, *bless such of my studies and in such a degree as* may be most to thy glory. If it be thy will, prepare me by them for the work to which I desire thou wouldest call and separate me.[1] I commit this work to which I would devote myself, into thy hands. Prosper it or not as thou seest good. Thy will be done respecting it; only take *all self-seeking out of it;* get thyself glory, Lord, in all that I do; and keep me from ever wishing to rob thee of thy glory. Lord, if thou wilt bless me abundantly, grant that in whatever thou givest me, I may remember I have received it, and not glory as if I had not received it. I set myself to this employment in the name of Jesus: may I have fellowship with him in it! Let it not become a snare to me; but may the Lord, who is my confidence, preserve my foot from

[1] This was a plan which lay very near her heart, for the gratuitous instruction of the children of missionaries, and of Christians in reduced circumstances, with a view to qualify them for the situation of teachers.

being taken in this net, which has so often entangled me!

"O thou Glorifier of Jesus! take of the things that are his, and show them unto me, and unto all thy people, with such light and power, that our wills, desires, and affections may be quite swallowed up in his love. Let us have no will but thy most holy will. Convince us that all things else are mere dross and dung, in comparison with *that* most excellent knowledge of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which do thou give us every day more abundantly, making us to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Even so, Holy Spirit, for the sake of thy great mercies in Christ Jesus, to whom, with thee and the Father, be all the honour, all the praise, and all the glory, now and forever. Amen."

The period of her illness embraces a large portion of what in her case, as her father observes, "might be not untruly called 'that long disease,—her life.'" From her childhood, her health was very delicate; and the long illness which occasioned her leaving school left a debility in her constitution, from which she suffered more or less to the end of life. Violent pains in her head, chest, and side appeared, however, to be the commencement of that disease which gradually developed a fatal character. For some years she was indeed able to exert herself (too often much beyond her strength), both in bodily and mental activity. She

continued her intellectual studies with her usual vigour, till about a year after her settlement in Devon, when increasing illness constrained her to send her young pupil to school, and she was never afterwards enabled, though she much wished it, to resume the care of her education. From that time she became a decided invalid, and, except in the year 1827 (when she changed the scene for the benefit of her health), she never moved beyond the garden, and only two or three times ventured into the outward air.[1] For the last two years she was entirely confined to her room, and unable to be dressed. During the whole of this period, her anxious mother slept in her chamber, watching over her with the most unremitting tenderness. She generally kept her bed, till within the last seven or eight months, when a violent cough and spasms in the heart prevented a reclining position, except when she was compelled to return to it by fainting and exhaustion. The only resource was a chair well supported with pillows, in which she sat up day and night, and from which the assistance of three persons was required to remove her during

[1] Of one of these times the following memorandum occurs in a letter to her cousin:—"To-day, I know not how, all my illness seems to have disappeared, and I feel much better, so that I have been out in the garden the second time since you left me. Ah! how delightful the weather was! what pleasure I felt in breathing the fresh air, in seeing the trees which begin to bud, the spring-flowers which are appearing, and in hearing the song of the birds, who seem to rejoice no less than myself in this new season!"

the last few weeks of her life. She appeared, however, to suffer less from debility than many invalids. For though she was wholly unable to stand, yet a change of medical regimen appeared to give her temporary relief from distressing helplessness.

In this state of wearisome languor and pain, her mind, however, was always vigorous and full of energy. She never seemed to know an idle moment. During the whole period of confinement to her bed, she was always surrounded with books, or other objects that engaged her attention. It was her habit to have her table placed by her bedside every night with her books and writing materials, that she might commence her operations with the earliest dawn of light. Her beloved Bible was always under her pillow, the first thing in her hand in the morning, and the last at night. Subordinate to this object of supreme interest, her diligence and perseverance in study were most remarkable. When reminded that such intense application must be injurious to her health, she always replied, that she considered these diversified sources of interest as among her greatest temporal blessings, in diverting her mind and attention from her bodily ailments. Her studies in the sick-room were as varied as in the time of health. Sometimes the languages were taken up. At other times the more engrossing study of mathematics fixed her mind. This in its turn was exchanged for chemistry or botany. Occasionally, when her mind was less equal to exertion, she would amuse herself with lighter employ-

ments. In the spring of her last year, she attempted to dry flowers, which her parents procured for her, with the intention of forming an herbarium. But increasing indisposition frustrated this plan. Cutting out paper was also a favourite amusement, in which she early excelled. Her skilful use of the scissors had attracted in her young days the admiration and interest of her school-fellows. She was also a beautiful netter, and sent a number of purses to her Spanish correspondent, which, when sold at a bazaar for his private benefit, produced upwards of three pounds. Thus in these various employments did her mind maintain its ceaseless activity, both in intellectual indulgence and in all the exercises of practical devotedness. No opportunity of usefulness appeared to be forgotten. When detained from the house of God by her protracted indisposition, her time and interest were employed in explaining the Scriptures to the servant who was necessarily occupied in attendance upon her; and, in one instance, it was hoped, as well as in a former case of much earlier date, that her simple and spiritual instructions in the household were applied with Divine unction and sovereign grace to the heart.

As, however, her illness evidently approached its termination, her employments assumed a character more exclusively spiritual. She was occupied in girding up her loins, and trimming her lamp, in constant and delighted expectation of her Lord's immediate coming.[1]

[1] Luke xii. 35, 36.

And now it was that the Christian graces, which had been matured in the school of affliction and under the influence of habitual communion with her God, displayed more manifestly their holiness, beauty, and consolation. This was (as an excellent clergyman, before adverted to, wrote to her father) "the fiery chariot, her vehicle to heaven, in which—the more it shook her mortal frame, until it left it all behind—the stronger and more full of faith and triumph in Christ Jesus she grew in her immortal spirit."

A detailed account of this last period of her mortal career will, it is presumed, be found generally interesting. In these solemn seasons is every feature more accurately defined; while the colouring is heightened by the impressive manifestation of the love and faithfulness of our God and Saviour.

To the last, her habits of active employment were predominant. Her thoughts and time were much occupied in preparing her two small, but valuable, works for publication; and she continued to correct the proof-sheets of them as they were sent to her, till within a few days of her death. At first her mind was divided between the completion of her projected Series of Letters to a Governess and the work On the Freeness of Divine Grace. But mature deliberation decided her in favour of the latter, as being calculated for more extensive usefulness. She was indefatigable also in her correspondence with her friends, upon the principle of duty, in using every opportunity of setting forth

the grand and inviting subject of the gospel to her fellow-sinners. She continued to write even after she was unable to use her pen, and when, having had just power to direct a pencil, her wrist had been bound up to give her a little strength.

She was usually favoured, throughout the last months of her life, with a remarkable sense of the Divine presence. During times of extreme agony, "Christ," she said, "is with me, 'touched with the feeling of mine infirmities.'"[1] Her intercourse with God at this solemn season, while it was most intimate, was yet *most hallowed.* One evening, after a day of great bodily suffering, her cousin went into her chamber to take leave of her for the night. The room was darkened, and perfectly quiet, and the state of her soul seemed to accord with the outer tranquillity. She said, "I can scarcely speak to you. The sense I have of the presence of God is so powerful that it almost overcomes me. He has often manifested himself to me; but never in such a manner as this night. Indeed, I feel ready to exclaim, with Job, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.'"[2] She said very little more, being evidently too deeply impressed to converse; but—her cousin adds—"I shall never forget that night."

Yet this sacredness of feeling was mingled with *cheerful delight.* It was truly Hooker's "reverend gayety."[3] "Oh!"—said she, one day, to a friend—

[1] Heb. iv. 15. [2] Job xlii. 5. [3] See Isaac Walton's Life.

"He gives me to speak to him 'face to face;' and sometimes, when I am so weak that I cannot utter words, his 'Spirit helpeth my infirmities, and maketh intercession for me with groanings that cannot be uttered.'[1] I love to feel my weakness, that I may experience 'his strength made perfect in weakness.'[2] *I delight to lie low before him.*"

She loved to speak of the character of God. Her mind appeared to be much expanded in the contemplation of his unsearchable nature and glorious perfections. "How delightful"—she observed on one occasion—"to think, that 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.'[3] All his dispensations are light; and though now they seem dark to us, hereafter all clouds will be dispelled."[4]

Her desires for a clear and full knowledge of God were most intense. "What"—she exclaimed one day—"are ten thousand worlds compared with one ray of the knowledge of God!" The ardour of her soul, unsatisfied with former manifestations, was continually stretched out for higher and deeper views of the Divine glory. She was not afraid to offer that prayer, which seems scarcely befitting an archangel's lips, and which only the clear warrant of the gospel preserves from the stamp of presumption:—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory."[5] Often did she entreat her minister to pray that more might be revealed to her in this world. Nor was the petition unheard. For, in reply to her

[1] Rom. viii. 26. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [3] 1 John i. 5.
[4] See John iii. 7; 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [5] Exodus xxxiii. 18.

dear mother's question a day or two before her death, her answer was, "I could not feel happier."

The concentration of all her thoughts upon eternity was peculiarly striking and edifying to those around her. This main concern for the last few months of her life absorbed her entire interest. Nothing unconnected with it seemed to possess any claim upon her attention. The engrossing delights of intellectual study were relinquished forever. She had no enjoyment of any train of conversation, except that which directly led her mind and contemplation heavenward. Communion with God was the one object of her desire. The word of God now occupied her whole attention. All other books—even her favourite authors, Romaine, Leighton, Milner —seemed comparatively uninteresting. This heavenly absorption of mind is finely depicted in the following short extract from one of her late letters to a friend:—

Stoke-Fleming, Oct. 1, 1830.

"My dear ——:

"Knowing that my life hangs upon a thread, I dare not delay answering your letter: I pray God to enable me to speak the truth to you in love, and to dispose you not to think me 'your enemy, because I tell you the truth.' But I *must*, as long as I continue to live, continue to urge you on the subject of religion. I speak not now willingly on any other subject; I desire to have no more to do with earthly things, but to turn my whole joyful expectation to that blessed Saviour whom I believe I shall soon

see face to face, through that infinite, undeserved love and kindness of his, which has taught me to put my whole trust in him for salvation."

Connected with this feature, we may add, that *she seemed so perfectly weaned from the world as scarcely to have an earthly wish.* Several times she took leave of her beloved relatives. In parting with her young cousin about three months before her death, she writes, "I have not one earthly care or wish; for even my cares for her are now all cast upon God, whose tender love will, I trust, lead her all her life long, as it has led me. She is going one way, and I shall soon depart in another way; but I would wait patiently." One day, earnestly recommending a friend to "cast all her care upon God," she gave the same expression of her mind, "*I have no earthly cares—no earthly wish.* But"—added she—"I have spiritual cares—spiritual wants; but I cast even them all upon God." Christ and eternity filled up the whole vacuum, and left nothing else to be desired.

Resignation to the will of God was prominently marked during her illness, and was to her the source of much heavenly enjoyment. After meditating upon her Saviour's words, "My meat is *to do* the will of him that sent me,"[1] she observed, "Though *I cannot now do the will* of my heavenly Father, I can suffer his will." She looked forward with great calmness to a protracted life of suffering, when the medical attendant gave his judgment that she

[1] John iv. 34.

might probably live for many years, but would never regain her health. As she was naturally of an energetic disposition, ardent in forming and executing her plans, this state of acquiescence to so inactive a life appeared manifestly to be the effect of Divine grace. Once, indeed, she remarked, with tears, that the prospect of lying on that bed for many years, of seeing her friends die around her, and those whom she loved remove away (alluding to the anticipated removal of the rector's family, which, however, she did not live to see), was a melancholy thought. But the passing cloud was soon dissipated, and she regained her usual cheerfulness.

The same warm temper of love to the Lord's people that had distinguished her general profession was ruling to the last. Even in her state of distressing weakness, she could not be satisfied without seeing some of them round her bed, that she might enjoy sensible communion with them. However weak they might be in faith, or low in condition, her heart was fervently drawn out in union with them. In referring to some refreshing intercourse with two eminent Christians, she observed, "How good my gracious God is in thus sending his saints to commune with me upon those deep and precious things which now form my only consolation, my 'joy, and the rejoicing of my heart'! But," added she—acknowledging the supremacy of her heavenly Friend, "after all, his presence is the only unfailing source of happiness. 'With him is the fountain of life; in his light shall we see light.'"[1]

[1] Psalm xxxvi. 9.

Her views of sin were deep. Her friend, observing her one morning to look unusually disturbed, ventured to express her concern; when she remarked, with a look that could not be forgotten, "*It is sin that hath made me so. I have passed such a night!*" The deep solemnity of her manner precluded any further inquiry. Yet it was afterwards discovered that it was not her own sin, but that of a dear friend that had so acutely pierced her. Of herself she observed, on another occasion, "Ever since I have known my sins to be pardoned, they have cost me a thousand times more distress than before." So awfully does the love of God, in pardoning, brighten their guilt.

The expressions of her deep humility were peculiarly striking during her illness. All her attainments in the Christian life were never thought of, but as dross and dung. Her sense of unprofitableness kept her low in the dust, while the recollections of faith, exercised in habitual application to the blood of her Redeemer, upheld her from despondency. When her minister ventured to express the advantage which his own soul had derived from attendance upon her, she exclaimed, with vehemence, "How should *such a dead dog*[1] as I am be of any use?" She sometimes seemed as if she could scarcely conceive the possibility of being the Lord's instrument for the good of his people, while at the same time she continued to employ her every power of body and mind in their service.

[1] 2 Sam. xvi. 9.

This *self-abasing apprehension was, however, combined with ardent gratitude to God as the author, and to her friends as the channel, of all her mercies.* Every attention, every act of kindness from her parents and nurses, excited the most lively emotions of thankfulness. Speaking, one day, of the kindness of her nurse, her minister observed, "But oh, how kind, how much kinder, *is Christ!*" "Yes," she replied, "but even all this kindness of the creature flows to me *through his love, his kindness.*" Thus did all her earthly comforts receive a double relish; thus also were her bitterest trials sweetened by being traced up to their Divine source, and by flowing into her soul through the delightful channel of the mediation of her Saviour.

The *same food that had nourished her throughout her journey continued to supply strength and vigour for the last efforts.* Her Bible was more invaluable than ever to her. It was her constant practice, before she went to rest, to repeat a text to her beloved mother, and to require one in return, assigning as a reason that she might have them to think upon after she was gone.[1] She pursued the same habit of scriptural repetition with her affectionate cousin,—the constant attendant upon the last months

[1] A few months before her death, she presented her little Bible to her mother, having obtained from her the assurance that she would read a chapter every day with prayer. In order to keep this promise in mind, if the precious treasure was at any time out of reach, she would playfully ask for it: "You know, dearest mother, it is not mine now; but do you lend it to me while I am here."

of her illness,—adding to it the privilege of social prayer, except when attacks of illness prevented it. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,"[1] was her favourite text to the last.

As in health, so especially in her last sickness, she had great delight in communion with the Holy Spirit. She used to address her prayers much to him, thought much of his personality, and found the contemplation of it most refreshing to her soul. She would often speak with comfort of her experience of his distinct influence upon her heart.

Hymns were also a source of much refreshment to her soul. She used to repeat many to herself, especially during the night, and was thankful to the last to have them repeated to her. The last that her cousin read to her, two days before her death, was one by Madame de Fleury, beginning—

"Ye angels, who stand round the throne," &c.

and Gambold's beautiful hymn,

"That I am thine, my Lord and God," &c.,

was a great favourite. Cowper and Toplady, also, were a source of great delight to her.

The support which was vouchsafed to her in the midst of her intense bodily sufferings was such as might have been expected from the known and tried faithfulness of her God. Such was her enjoyment, at some seasons of agony, that her "pains,"

[1] John xvi. 24.

as she said on one occasion, "were sweeter than honey or the honeycomb." At one of her times of distress she remarked, "I am a child lying in the arms of Christ, and he treats me with more than a mother's tenderness." Truly indeed was she "strengthened with all might, according to the glorious power of God, unto all patience and long-suffering *with joyfulness*."[1]

It is almost needless to add, as the concluding article of detail, *that the sting of death was removed from her.*

"It is not death to me," she would say. "Jesus hath tasted death for me, and hath drunk up all its bitterness." The prospect of eternity was entirely divested of its terrors, and beamed with the bright anticipation of everlasting joy.

She would sometimes speak of herself as a disembodied spirit, as if she realized, in the fullest perception and assurance, her entrance into the world of blessedness. Her frequent reference to her departure was in calm composure,—like making preparation for a short journey or a temporary absence. At other times it was in joyful hope. On one occasion,—six months before her death,—when she was thought to be dying, she unexpectedly revived, and, seeing her weeping friends around her, asked her dear mother why they were all in tears, adding, with great animation, "Do you think that I shall be with Jesus to-morrow?" At another of these times she exclaimed, "If the Lord should

[1] Col. i. 11.

come and take me this night! but, oh! that is too much to hope for." After a violent attack of coughing and spasm, a friend observed, "I fear you suffer much." "Oh, no!" she replied; "I delight to feel the pins of the tabernacle taking out." She burst into tears when a physician, who occasionally saw her, informed her that the disease had not made the progress which he had supposed. This, however, was but a momentary feeling. For, upon her mother's reminding her that she was only not quite so near home as she had expected, she replied, "Oh, no! this is wrong," dried up her tears, and returned to her usual serenity and cheerfulness. Writing to one of her friends, in reference to a beloved saint who had died in the triumph of the gospel, she remarked, "Well, I shall have one friend more to welcome me when the Lord's time shall come to 'administer' to me also 'an entrance into his everlasting kingdom.' Oh, blessed hope! happy sinners saved by the blood of Jesus." Then she adds this affectionate exhortation, "Oh, my dear, my beloved friend, I charge you so to devote yourself to the Lord that 'the full assurance of hope' may cheer you now, and at the hour of death." Upon receiving the intelligence of the sudden death of another Christian friend, she exclaimed, "I have heard the good news. She has rent the veil at once. Mine is taking down piece by piece. By-and-by I shall find a chink large enough to get out of; like a bird confined in a cage, and fluttering about to extricate itself in vain, till at last, the door being

open, the happy prisoner wings its flight towards heaven." There might probably be an occasional mixture of infirmity in these intense desires for her home. It is, indeed, the dictate of Christian wisdom to prefer the gain of death. But it is equally the part of Christian obedience to embrace the service of life; and the desire to depart, so far as it is not subjugated to the readiness to wait, partakes of the nature of self-will more than of holy affections. Generally, however, the ardency of her desires appeared to be subdued to a resignation to the Divine will. Thus, in reference to her dissolution, she writes to the aged minister who, during her residence in London, had been the means of communicating established peace to her soul, "Blessed be my all-sufficient Saviour, that, accepted in him, a few months more or less can make no great difference: 'Neither life nor death can separate us from his love.'"[1] On one occasion, after expressing her earnest longing to depart, she checked herself, and added, "*But I am willing to sit here a hundred or a thousand years, if it be the will of God.*"

Her mind maintained its vigorous character in the midst of her protracted sufferings. The subjects of her conversation were usually of a highly interesting character. She would often speak with considerable clearness, combined with deep humility, of the more mysterious parts of revelation, such as the distinct Persons of the Holy Trinity; the person and glory of Christ; the ministry of angels; the

[1] Romans viii. 38, 39.

state of separate spirits; the prospects of the church of Christ. It is much to be regretted that no particular details of these conversations are preserved. The resurrection and future glory of the body were favourite subjects with her. She delighted to dwell upon 1 Cor. xv. "What a wonderful change"—she observed on one occasion—"takes place in nature in the acorn,—which from so small and insignificant a seed afterwards expands and grows into a noble tree, the glory of the forest! What a remarkable transformation also is that of the caterpillar,—which, after having been changed into apparently dead matter, at the appointed time bursts its shell and becomes a beautiful winged insect! Had we not witnessed such changes, we should not have believed them possible. But, having seen them in nature, shall we doubt the possibility of that great change which will take place at the resurrection-day, when 'this vile body shall be fashioned like unto the glorious body' of our Lord?"[1]

For a short time, however, before her death, the enemy was permitted to harass her soul, and her lively apprehensions of the gospel were occasionally obscured. At one of these times she said to her minister, "Christ is not so precious to me as he deserves." "No," it was replied; "he is so to none." "But," she added, "he 'feeds me with food convenient for me,' though I do not experience those spiritual enjoyments I so ardently long for." Of a distressing season of temptation which hap-

[1] Phil. iii. 21.

pened about this time, her minister writes, "I shall never forget the state of her mind. It seemed as if 'a horror of great darkness had fallen upon her.'[1] 'Oh,' she said, 'I cannot pray; I can only utter words. It is mere wind.' She earnestly called upon me to strengthen her, by repeating the promises of the gospel. God at that time seemed to give me words. For, when I scarcely knew what to say, words of effectual consolation were put into my mouth. Once, in her impatience to hear the word, she exclaimed, 'Oh, say something to me from God, whether a word of comfort or reproof.' I think of that proverb, 'The full soul loatheth the honey-comb; *but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.*'[2] At these times of 'needful heaviness, through manifold temptations,' while 'walking in darkness, and having no light,' she was, however, manifestly enabled to 'trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay upon her God.'[3] She could not enjoy the full manifestation of her God, which she had known in times past. 'Yet though'—she said—'I cannot love God with that warmth which I so earnestly desire, I can act faith upon him.' She complained much of deadness in prayer. Yet her faith was in exercise, upholding her soul upon the sure word of promise, that her Lord would return to her in his own best time. She would at such seasons cheer her soul by repeating suitable promises. 'When the poor and needy

[1] Genesis xv. 12.

[2] Proverbs xxvii. 7.

[3] 1 Peter i. 6, with Isaiah l. 10.

seek for water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth them for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Jacob will not forsake them;'[1] on this encouraging promise she rested in one of her seasons of distress and desertion. At another time she would say, 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.'[2] And again, 'The Lord my God shall enlighten my darkness.'[3] At these times of trial the book of Canticles was much upon her mind. 'By night I sought my beloved, but I found him not.' Then she added, 'but I sought not in vain.' She appeared to be at this time much enlivened in speaking of her Saviour as represented under the figure of the bridegroom. 'He loves us to such a degree, that he seeks after us, he desires, he delights in us,—all which is to be seen in this wonderful portion of Scripture.' At another of these times she remarked that often in the experience of the Lord's servants a season of darkness had preceded some special manifestation of his love. Thus, as she observed, 'Jacob wrestled *a whole night;* and it was not until the daybreak that the angel revealed himself.'[4] Thus for a while our Lord seemed to disregard the cry of the Canaanitish woman; but 'the trial of her faith was' eventually 'found to praise, and honour, and glory.'[5] Thus also the disconsolate state of the disciples in their journey to Emmaus

[1] Isaiah xli. 17. [2] Micah vii. 9. [3] Psalm xviii. 28.
[4] Canticles iii. 1; Genesis xxxii. 24, 25.
[5] Matthew xv. 22–28, with 1 Peter i. 7.

was the prelude and harbinger of a blessed display of their Master's light and love."[1]

The dark clouds which, "for a small moment,"[2] had been permitted to spread themselves over her soul, were, however, shortly dispelled; and "at evening time it was light."[3] Her extreme weakness, indeed, prevented her utterance; but the few words that could be gathered from her were descriptive of the peace and joy that reigned within. "My weakness"—she said—"reposes on his strength; my folly, on his wisdom." When her minister, in allusion to her late painful exercises, observed, "God was 'leading her *by the right way* to the city of habitation,'" she replied, "Oh, yes; but how different is the case of those who 'wander in the wilderness in a solitary way, and *find no city to dwell* in!'"[4] In the last visit of this beloved attendant, "God"—she said to him—"is the rock of my salvation." Then, speaking of her being detained in her earthly tabernacle, she added, "It is a comfort to think that 'Christ has the keys of death and of hell.'[5] All is well. May God be with you during the remainder of your pilgrimage! I can only lie as an infant in the hands of God."

Her bodily sufferings, at the last period, were most severe, arising from a complication of diseases. Her lungs, which had been supposed to be sound, were discovered after her death to have been fatally

[1] Luke xxiv. 17–34.
[2] Isaiah liv. 7.
[3] Zech. xiv. 7.
[4] Psalm cvii. 7, with 4.
[5] Rev. i. 18.

diseased. Her heart, also, was found to be enlarged. Her weakness and inability to recline for so many weeks, produced dropsy in her feet and legs. This was, however, from time to time relieved by incision. Her life terminated at last by a rapid mortification in one of her legs. The last day of her life was a day of intense agony. She was obliged to take doses of opium, which before she could not touch, so that the day and night, till she expired, were passed in a doze, or in the most violent suffering. A few words only were preserved at this affecting crisis. A day or two before her death, she cried, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; 'nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.'" At another time, speaking of "the glory that shall be revealed," she exclaimed, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."[1] Alluding to those who watched by her side, she said, "What a comfort that we are not watching alone! 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.'"[2] Then again, shortly after, "I know whom I have believed."[3] Then again, in a moment of excruciating suffering, to her mother, "Pray for me, that my patience may not fail me at the last." The last words she was heard to utter before her death, in a moment of deep agony, were, "I am come into deep waters; O God, my rock, 'hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.'" The next morning, on Friday, December 10, 1830,

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [2] Psalm cxxi. 4. [3] 2 Tim. i. 12.

without a sigh or a struggle, she entered into her eternal rest.

Thus upheld by the good hope of the gospel,—thus having displayed in lovely concord the diversified graces of the Christian profession,—thus having been abundantly refreshed by the consolations of Christ,—this blessed sufferer, this ransomed sinner, this victorious believer, fell asleep in the arms of her Saviour and her God. She heard, and gladly obeyed the call of her Lord, "'Come up hither.' Lay down the cross, and take the crown."

"TO HIM THAT OVERCOMETH WILL I GRANT TO SIT WITH ME IN MY THRONE, EVEN AS I ALSO OVERCAME, AND AM SET DOWN WITH MY FATHER IN HIS THRONE."[1]

[1] Rev. iii. 21.

THE TEST OF TRUTH.

THE TEST OF TRUTH.

PART I.

LUKE xi. 9.

ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU.

I AM not ignorant of the disadvantage under which I labour, in addressing a class of readers who despise the Bible, with a quotation from the Bible. Such a commencement carries with it an air both of unfairness and inconsistency. It looks like an attempt to assume the point in dispute, and to argue from a source which we have not yet proved to be genuine. Let me hasten to dispel a suspicion so unfavourable to a candid reception of the observations I am about to offer. Rational and philosophizing skeptics, in presenting you with the above text of Scripture, I do not ask you to receive it as the word of God, but only to bestow upon it a little of that patient and courteous attention which the word of one of your fellow-men might claim from you. You cannot, in justice to your own professions of candour and equity, refuse compliance with so reasonable a demand.

Without further apology, I submit one of the sayings of Jesus Christ to your attentive consideration. I am far from any intention of pressing you with its divine authority, or insisting on a blind obedience. Upon its own merits let it stand or fall.

My object, in thus briefly addressing you, is not to convince, but to direct you to a method by which you may convince yourselves. With this design I shall take nothing for granted but what you will be readily disposed to concede. I will suppose that it is yet a matter of doubt whether the Scriptures are the genuine and lively oracles of God, or the sordid, lying invention of man. Take, if you please, a still further advantage. Assume that appearances are strongly *against* their divine origin; that the external evidences of Christianity are insufficient, her internal proof unsatisfactory, her professors few and inconsistent, her opponents respectable both in number and talents, the objections against her weighty and plausible, and all the arguments in her favour weak and inconclusive. I will further suppose that you are in earnest when you assert that truth alone is the object of your search, and that you are ready to embrace her wherever you find her. I say, I will suppose that you are in earnest. And truly I should offer an affront to your understandings, both as men and philosophers, were I to imagine you capable of viewing the subject in any other than a serious light.

If, then, you refuse to believe the Bible, it must be because you can find no means of proving it to

be true. It cannot be because you love to continue in darkness, in perplexity, in unbelief. Let me put the case, that some infallible criterion were proposed to you,—some method of ascertaining, by your own personal experience, the truth or falsehood of the Bible. May it not be inferred that you would be eager to put it fairly to the test, and willing to abide by the result of your experiment?

Such a criterion I am about to propose to you. It is so simple, that a child may comprehend; so just, that a philosopher may approve; and so forcible, that none who have fairly tried have ever been found able to withstand it. Such is the saying of Jesus Christ to which I now invite your attention, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Who Jesus Christ was, or what degree of deference is due to his word, it suits not my present purpose to inquire. I shall content myself with proving to you that the saying now under consideration contains nothing in itself absurd or improbable. And, having established this necessary point, I shall propose it to you as the touchstone of truth. I am fully aware of the proud self-sufficiency with which unconverted men expect the mightiest truths to be brought down to the level of human reason. It shall, therefore, be my care, in the few simple propositions which I shall lay before you, to introduce nothing which can too severely tax your belief or your understanding.

You are, I hope, willing to allow that this universal frame is the work of some Divine uncreated Intelligence. You are not yet so thoroughly debased

in heart and intellect, as to be able to look round on the wonders of creation without perceiving in them all manifest tokens of creating power. But I am prepared to make every allowance for the strength of your incredulity or the dulness of your comprehension. If, therefore, I appear to you to have asked too much, I will be yet more moderate in my demands. It is enough for my argument if you admit that the existence of God, if not certain, is at least probable, or, if not probable, that it is at least possible. The various instances of deep design and exquisite contrivance which force themselves upon your notice on every side, will not suffer you to deny the *possible* existence of some great Designer and Contriver. Whether you look upwards, at the innumerable starry host; or downwards, upon the insect that crawls beneath your feet; around you, on the beauteous furniture of the universe; or within, upon the little world of thought and feeling that is stirring in your own bosom, whichever way you look, whichever way you turn, you are met by something which compels you to acknowledge that the existence of God is no absurd or improbable hypothesis. Even that man who wrote "atheist" under his name, was not, I am persuaded, an atheist when alone. There is no such thing as an atheist in solitude. You may boast that you are one in the convivial circle; but you cannot support the character in your closet. There God will find you out. There the unwelcome reality of his presence will confound you. And not only so, but even in

the height of social mirth, when surrounded by friends who sympathize and admire, you dare to make merry with the name and being of God,—even then a secret horror, a sad foreboding conviction, will sometimes shiver through your frame, and you will feel in every pore that *GOD IS*, and that vain are your puny efforts to annihilate him. I appeal to the stoutest heart among you whether I speak truth. You cannot quite divest yourself of the conviction; you know you cannot. God has not left himself without witness, even in your heart. There is a point at which incredulity itself must make a stand; and that point is, the existence of God.

I take it, then, for granted that some of you will admit the existence of Almighty God to be undeniably certain: many will own that it is probable: and *all* will allow that it is *possible.*

Neither will you be so hardy as to deny that, *if there be a God*, the highest happiness of his creatures must consist in knowing, and their highest duty in loving, him. The Maker of every grand and lovely object must be infinitely grand and lovely; and if to know his works be good, to know himself must be better than all. But if he be *our* Maker,—if in him *we* live, and move, and have our being, then surely it must be our most urgent concern to know one with whom we have so much to do. If he be our Maker, do we owe him no service? If our Benefactor, do we owe him no thanks? If he be our Father, must we not love him? If our

Master, must we not fear him? But how can we render service or thanks, love or praise, to an *unknown* being? We may, indeed, view him with a servile dread; for nature itself teaches us to shrink from that which we do not know. But we cannot serve God till we know what he requires of us. We cannot thank him till we know what he has done for us. We cannot love God till we are acquainted with his thoughts and purposes towards us. Love, such as deserves the name, implies knowledge, communion, tried excellence, unlimited confidence. Those dark, shadowy, undefined notions which the Deist entertains of God, may cause a slight thrill of admiration, a transient glow of thankfulness, to pass across his bosom; but they will produce no real, substantial, enduring sentiment,—they will never make him *love*. To know God must then be our highest happiness, whether we consider his intrinsic excellence, or the relation in which we stand to him as his creatures. And as the Maker cannot but be infinitely greater than any of the things he has made, so the knowledge of God cannot but be infinitely more desirable than the knowledge of his works.

It is a self-evident proposition, that what is worth having is worth seeking. If, then, the knowledge of God be so well worth having, it must be proportionably worth seeking. No pains can possibly be too great to bestow on the attainment of such an object. I am not now speaking of the existence of God as undeniably established. I affirm that the

bare possibility that a Being so glorious and beautiful exists, makes it worth our while to leave the contemplation of every other glory and every other beauty, till we have either discovered this great original of all that is beautiful and glorious, or can give satisfactory proof that no such original exists. The bare possibility that there is a Being who stands related to us as our Creator and Father, renders it an act of parricide, if I may so express myself, not to inquire after him, that we may fulfil the duties which those relations imply.

Admit, then, that God is worth knowing, and you must also admit the inevitable consequence, that God is worth seeking. Indeed, it would seem superfluous to dwell on either of these propositions, were it not that in our own little corner of God's universe, filled with a set of God's creatures who style themselves reasonable beings, there are yet many who can find time to amass stores of human learning, time to perfect themselves in all the wisdom of this world, but no time or inclination to ask, "Where is God my Maker, who teacheth me more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh me wiser than the fowls of heaven?" However, let your actions be what they may, I do suppose your understandings will hardly refuse their assent to the proposition that the knowledge of God, if we could attain to it, would amply repay us for any labour we might endure in the attainment.

Neither will you be disposed to contradict my next assertion, that, whoever this glorious being

may be, the world is in a state of great ignorance and confusion respecting his nature and attributes, and the kind of duty and worship that is due to him from his creatures. A single glance at the various and absurd religions of mankind may suffice to convince us that God is not universally, nor even generally, known upon the earth. Out of so many different gods, only one can be the *true* God. Out of so many different religions, only one can be the *right* religion. Perhaps you will say, *all* are equally wrong. Such an opinion does but add to the force of my proposition. Whoever God is, it must be alike obvious both to Christians and infidels that the world in general knows very little about him.

If you agree with me in what I have said,—if you admit that God is worth knowing, and that he is worth seeking, in an infinitely higher degree than any thing else is worth knowing or seeking; and if you also perceive that mankind are in a state of ignorance concerning him,—you will deeply feel the importance of the inquiry I am about to propose. How, amidst this variety of conflicting opinions, shall I find out that which is right? Or, if all are in error, where shall the truth be sought? What possible means can I take to become acquainted with God my Maker?

Does reason, does common sense, suggest no answer to this inquiry? Do they not say, "Apply for information to *the only Being who is likely to give it you.* In plain terms, none can know

God so well as he knows himself. Therefore, *ask God"?*

This method appears so obvious, so direct and natural, that it is difficult to conceive how any one can object to it, or hope to propose a better. Yet it is this very method which infidels will neither themselves seriously try, nor permit others to try, if they can help it. Let a man address himself in good earnest to prayer, and they will immediately set him down for a person of a weak and shallow understanding, a mere superstitious driveller. Or, if he be known to possess a powerful and commanding intellect, then they will lament, with a sigh of benevolent regret, that so great a man should be deformed by so great a weakness. But if the praying person should carry his extravagance to such a height as to persuade himself that God hears him when he prays, and gives him what he asks for, by what name will they designate such infatuation? They waver between the terms hypocrite and madman, or, perhaps, suspect that a combination of these characters was needful to conduct a man to such a climax of absurdity. And all this contempt is excited because a reasonable being, actuated by a reasonable desire to know the Author of his being, and by a reasonable persuasion that none can teach him what he wants to know so well as that Author, avoids every indirect and circuitous method of obtaining the desired information, and applies at once to God for the knowledge of God.

Why should it seem so unaccountable to pray to

God? Why so absurd to expect an answer to our prayers? I could let you into the secret cause of that mingled pity and disgust with which you regard those who pray. But for the present I forbear. My object is to prove to you that their conduct is not quite so absurd as you imagine. To apply to God himself for the knowledge of God is a mode of proceeding perfectly just and rational. It is so, whether you regard the existence of God as certain, or merely admit it as possible.

For, in the first place, if there be a God, he must be in full possession of the information you require. *He cannot but know himself.* He cannot but know himself *better than any other being knows him.* He, therefore, who desires to know any thing about God, and would apply to one most thoroughly informed on the subject, *must apply to God.* This is inquiring at the fountain-head. All other plans, in comparison with this, appear indirect, far-fetched, and unnatural.

2. It is, also, reasonable to suppose, that if there be a God, *he must be capable of hearing all that his creatures say to him.* Whether they address him with their lips, or only in the secret of their hearts, they cannot be addressing an unconscious God. A God, and yet unconscious! The thing is impossible. "He who made the ear, shall he not hear?" He who formed the heart, shall he not know what is passing there? If we speak to God, the probability of his hearing us is the same with the probability of his existing at all. On the other hand, the argu-

ment, if you can find one, which shall prove God to be unconscious of any thing that we say or think, will at once set aside the being of God altogether. There is no God; or, God knows all that is in my heart. One of these two propositions must be true. However degraded and unworthy notions you may entertain of the Supreme Being, you cannot, in these enlightened ages, imagine him to be ignorant of what is going on in a world of his own making. Should you, at any time, feel disposed to address him, you will not surely be deterred by the fear that he may be on a journey, and so out of reach of your voice; or asleep, and, therefore, unable to listen; or perplexed and encumbered with such a multiplicity of affairs that he will be too busy to attend. Despised Christianity has taught men to discard these idle notions. If, then, there be any absurdity in praying to God, it certainly cannot arise out of the circumstance of God's being incapable of hearing.

3. It is sufficiently evident, that if God be *able to hear* our petitions, he is also *able to grant* them, if he please. He who made our understandings at first must be capable of illuminating them. He who gave us such capacities for knowing him must be able to satisfy and fill up those capacities. We have already admitted that he must be fully possessed of the information we require. What should hinder him from conveying that information to us, if such should be his will? Do you say that our minds are incapable of being informed on so diffi-

cult a subject? You have no means of proving such an assertion. If you had, it would be no way to the purpose, unless you could also prove that God cannot render them capable. Does it comport even with your own ideas of the Deity, to affirm that he has expended the whole of his creative power upon the mind of man, so that he really can do nothing more to improve or enlarge it? As rational creatures, we *must* be capable of knowing our Creator; and God, as our Creator, *must* be able to convey to our minds the knowledge of himself.

4. Again, we have every reason to believe that as God is *able*, so he is *willing*, to grant our petitions. You will, perhaps, tell me that it is presumptuous to imagine that a Being of such transcendent greatness should stoop from his high majesty to meddle with the paltry concerns of men. Now, I conceive that, since it was not inconsistent with the dignity of God to make us at first, we are warranted to conclude that it will by no means derogate from his greatness to care about us when we are made. It argues a kind of puerile inconsistency, rather than godlike majesty, to make man, and then throw him aside without further thought of what happens to him. But this objection takes its rise from the narrowness of your own understanding. Because you cannot attend to a great many things at a time, you think God cannot. Do not let comparisons of this nature mislead you. Be assured that God's powers of attention cannot, with any propriety, be measured by yours. His

mind can neither be oppressed by a variety, nor encumbered by a multiplicity, of objects. Witness this universe which he has created. Nor is his greatness of so fragile and perishable a nature that it can receive any injury by stooping to the lowest or meanest object. The little dignitaries of the earth may fear to attend to little things, lest they should appear incapable of what is great, or should really neglect it; for they cannot attend to the one without neglecting the other. It is not so with God. Do you say that he will not stoop to mind little things? Look around you. Behold what minute attention he has bestowed upon thousands of objects which to us appear small and insignificant! See how curiously he has painted the wings of the butterfly! How softly he has pencilled the cups of the snowdrop! Let the little daisy, which you carelessly tread under foot, declare who shaped its many leaflets, who tipped them with crimson, and placed in the midst a circle of gold. Which of the birds has God forgotten to feed? Which of the insects, that dance in the sunbeam, has he left unfinished for want of time, or because of their insignificance? How has he descended from his majesty to give lessons of wisdom to the little ant and the bee! In the whole kingdom of nature, we cannot perceive one instance of hasty inattention or of supercilious dignity. God has forgotten nothing. He has despised nothing. How can we conceive, then, that he should forget or despise us? Why should the prayers of his rational

creatures alone escape his notice? Why should their souls be too insignificant to attract his benevolent attention? Besides, what should induce you to suppose that a soul is a small or valueless thing in the sight of God? Think you that he has laid out so much wisdom upon making and informing *a thing of little worth?* He has made us capable of knowing him. This marks our value in his sight; for nothing can be worthless that is capable of knowing God. And it affords us a sufficient intimation, that if we ask God for the knowledge of which he has made us capable, he will be willing to give it to us. We cannot be accused of offering an unreasonable petition, when we desire only to know Him who made us; for without this knowledge we might as well have been made, in all respects, like the irrational creatures.

5. But not only are we justified in supposing that God is willing to teach us, we have also every reason to infer that he is *more* willing to instruct those who *pray* than those who do *not* pray to him; to bestow his gifts upon those who appear desirous of obtaining them, rather than upon those who set on them no value whatever. For a creature not to seek the knowledge of his Creator is a neglect which bespeaks him to be sunk in the most besotted stupidity and the vilest ingratitude. To revel in the gifts, and forget the Giver, or to remember him with indifference; to thirst after earthly wisdom, and yet to have no ardent aspirations after Him who is the fountain of true wisdom, argues such

gross perverseness and inconsistency that we cannot much wonder if God should leave those who are guilty of it to grope in their own beloved ignorance. But to pretend that we aspire to know God, and yet to neglect even the effort of asking him to teach us, this is indeed to add to all our other crimes that barefaced hypocrisy which can scarcely impose upon men, and openly insults God. Little as we know of this infinite Being, the secret instinct, which himself has planted in our hearts, may teach us that he will not probably bestow his most precious gifts without some expression of desire on our parts. He may reasonably expect that we should not show ourselves quite insensible to our need of this divine teaching, and may justly conclude that what we do not choose to solicit we do not desire to obtain.

But I think I hear you reply, "Shall I offer such an insult to the omniscience of God as to imagine that he needs to be informed of my wants?" Who requires you to entertain so absurd a supposition? We do not tell you that prayer is necessary for God's information, but for your relief. He may know all your wants, and yet require that you should have a sense of them, and should express that sense to him, before he will grant you a supply. He may know that prayer, as the means of softening, humbling, and purifying your hearts, is not the least pressing of your necessities. He who has made you capable of receiving consolation by pouring out your troubles into the bosom of a friend, may be willing that you should enjoy the infinitely

superior relief of confiding your wants and sorrows to the ear of his mercy. None of these suppositions are impossible or improbable, even upon your own notions of the Deity. Inasmuch as you believe that God is a distinguished and a benevolent Being, they are far more probable than the contrary supposition.

You reason more justly on points which affect your temporal interests. You do not refuse to plough and sow, to plant and water, because God already *knows* that you want the fruits of the earth, and ought, therefore, to give them to you without your wearisome toil. You care not to spend many an anxious hour in the acquisition of useful knowledge, because God *knows* that it would be very useful to you, and is, therefore, bound to instil it into your mind without your pains. No; in these things your worldly interest or pleasure is concerned. You have a real desire for them. And therefore, instead of sitting down to philosophize on the part that *God* ought to take on the occasion, you immediately set yourself to do what *you* can, and employ, without hesitation, whatever means seem best suited to your purpose.

Prayer seems to be the only direct and rational means of obtaining the knowledge of God. For there is no other being in the universe to whom we can apply with such certainty of not being misled. Yet truly you will not pray to God, because he needs none of your information. Let me tell you, that if you really long to acquaint yourself with

God, the sense of your need would wring from you the most earnest supplications, nor would you be at leisure to consider whether or no you were conveying to him a piece of superfluous information. The heart that is touched with a desire to know God will be lifting itself up in prayer, while others are reasoning upon the propriety of so doing.

Again: I would remind you that although God is not ignorant how much we need to be rightly informed about him, yet the state of the world affords sufficient proof that he has not in all cases relieved this necessity. So that his perfect knowledge of our wants does not, as an inevitable consequence and without any application on our parts, produce the relief of our wants. Besides, you have already waited some twenty, thirty, forty years. All this time God has been aware of your need of instruction. Yet you are still in a state of doubt and ignorance. Surely you have waited long enough to see whether God will grant a spontaneous relief to your necessities. It is now high time to employ *means* for the attainment of your wish. And since prayer has been shown to be the most likely and natural means, let me advise you at once to try what prayer can do for you. At all events, you will not then have to reproach yourself with having lost the best blessing in the universe for want of asking.

6. But, lastly, whatever be the result of your prayers, *they certainly cannot leave you in a worse condition than before.* For, supposing even that

God should refuse to grant your petition, it is of all things the most unlikely and inconceivable that he should take a malignant pleasure in thwarting your desires, by giving you the very contrary of what you ask. Should he refuse to give you knowledge, he will not at least visit you with an increase of ignorance and delusion. The argument with which Jesus Christ urges this subject, if not divinely uttered, is, to say the least of it, the most wise, appropriate, and convincing that ever fell from the lips of man or angel:—

"*If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?* IF YE THEN, BEING EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS UNTO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE SHALL YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THEM THAT ASK HIM?"[1]

The simple majesty of this appeal must find its way to every bosom. It must be felt by all whose hearts have throbbed with a parent's love or whose wants have been supplied by a parent's bounty. It applies to the ideas which the Deist entertains of God, as well as to those which are cherished by the follower of Jesus. According to your own notions (if notions you may be said to have, where all is so vague and indistinct), you reject with abhorrence the idea that the God who made and who preserves you is an *Unnatural Father*, who with wanton

[1] Luke xi. 11–13.

cruelty would thwart the noblest aim and cast down the most reasonable hope of his own offspring. Such a character of God is not to be found in the wildest ravings of impiety. Could any one *believe* this of God, despair would soon prey upon his existence. Yet this principle you indirectly maintain, this solemn insult you offer to the character of God, when you assert that *habits of prayer lead to enthusiasm.* Not only so, but you outrage the common sense and common feeling of mankind, which declare, as by an instinct implanted by the Giver of life himself, that a father *cannot* turn the petition of his child into derision. But you say that the great, the original Father can and does act thus in opposition to his own universal law. You say that when his children ask bread he mocks them with a stone; when they implore food he offers them naught but the scorpion's venom. When a man, deeply impressed with a sense of his ignorance, asks of God the knowledge of his holy will, no sooner does he betake himself to this way of gaining information than you cry out that he is possessed with the spirit of delusion and enthusiasm. The more earnestly and frequently he entreats God to give him light and truth, the more deluded you think him; that is (*for it will bear no other interpretation*), you think that God derides the requests of his creatures, and forces them deeper into the maze of ignorance and error, for no other cause but because they have stretched out their hands to him to extricate them. Ye who profess to make reason your

guide, tell me, was it *reason* that led you to this conclusion? Where will you find in the Bible any mode of arguing half so absurd as this is?

A brief recapitulation of the above observations may not be unnecessary. We have remarked that God must be in full possession of the information we require; that he must be able to hear us when we pray to him,—able to give us what we ask; that we have great reason to infer that he is *willing* to hear and teach us,—*more* willing to teach those who *ask* him than those who do *not* ask him; and, lastly, that, be the result of our application what it may, it cannot leave us in a worse state than we were in before. From all these things I infer that to seek the knowledge of God by prayer is no absurd or irrational mode of procedure: nay, more; that the expediency of prayer is in the same ratio with the probability of God's existence. Or, to accommodate myself to the lowest degree of belief, the very slightest possibility that there is a God, affords an equal possibility that he may instruct us in answer to our prayers, and, therefore, renders the act of prayer reasonable and expedient. The saying of Jesus Christ, "Ask, and it shall be given you,"—"God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him,"[1] —is not only the voice of the Bible, but the voice of *reason*, the voice of *nature*, and, therefore, the voice of God.

But we have hitherto considered this saying only in itself. I propose, secondly, to consider it in con-

[1] Luke xi. 9, 13.

nection with the book in which it is written, and to propose it as a fair and sufficient test of the truth or falsehood of that book.

It appears, from the common confession of Christians and infidels, that the world is, to say the least, not very well furnished with the knowledge of its Maker. Nothing, therefore, which offers the smallest hope of obtaining light upon this momentous subject, ought to be passed over without inquiry. A book has been handed down to us, professing to be a revelation from God to man, and offering him all the knowledge of which he stands in need. This book is by some blindly embraced for the very same reason that would have induced them, under other circumstances, to have adopted the Alcoran, the Shaster, or the Zendavesta. Others profess to receive it upon rational grounds of conviction, and to hold actual communication with the Deity who is revealed in its sacred message. A third party reject the book altogether, and cast it from them with every mark of contempt. With these last I would now speak. Do not reject even the Bible till you have put its truth or falsehood fairly to the test. But you say, "How are we to try it? All the evidence we meet with appears to us insufficient. We refuse to give credit to the writings of the apostles. *We* never saw the miracles they relate; they are not, therefore, calculated for our conviction. Such things are contrary to our experience, shock our common sense, and we write 'imposture' upon them all. As for the revelation they pretend to

have received from God, that revelation never came to *us*. *We* are in no respect benefited by it. If God will have us to believe as they did, he must reveal himself to us as he did to them. We cannot receive the thing at second-hand. When the God of the Scriptures shall favour us by revealing himself to us,—when he shall afford us some infallible test whereby we may prove that his word is true,—then we will open our minds to conviction. But till then we must retain our doubts upon the subject."

Such is the reasoning we repeatedly hear from the lips of infidels. I will not now stop to admire the happy self-complacency with which you boldly pronounce a thing to be impossible, because it has never happened within the little span of your experience, and unreasonable, because it surpasses the narrow bounds of your understanding. Neither will I pause to extol the spirit with which, as a creature, you think proper to dictate to your Creator. Waiving all consideration of the terms in which you express yourself, I admit the general truth of your proposition. I am persuaded that you never will believe the Scriptures till God himself "opens your understanding to understand the Scriptures." And I tell you that these same Scriptures contain an abundant provision against the difficulties you have raised. They offer you ample means of proving, *by your own personal experience*, whether they be true or false. *That immediate revelation which you profess to desire, is actually promised*

to you, upon the simple condition of your asking for it. "*Ask, and it shall be given you.*"[1]

What is the gift here promised? It is no other than "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, who shall guide you into all truth." "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. For if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more shall your heavenly Father give* HIS HOLY SPIRIT *to them that ask him?*"

TAKE JESUS CHRIST AT HIS WORD. The experiment is at once simple and decisive. Should it fail, you will then have some reason to reject the Bible. Truth, immutable truth, is one of the attributes which reason and Scripture concur in ascribing to God. We cannot form to ourselves the conception of a God who can lie. To divest God of his attribute of truth is to strip him of his Godhead, to bring him down to a level with ourselves. The Bible makes this a grand distinction between God and man:—"God is not a man, that he should lie." "*He* is ever mindful of his covenant;" but they, *like men,* "have transgressed the covenant."[2]

Here, then, the question is brought within a very narrow compass. If the Creator of the universe be the same God who is revealed in the Scriptures, he cannot but honour his own word of promise. He has *pledged* himself; *he cannot but redeem his pledge.*

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[1] See the author's interesting and satisfactory application of this Test to her own case, pp. 124–127.

[2] Numb. xxiii. 19; Psalm cxi. 5; Joshua vii. 11.

Every attribute of the Deity binds him to the performance of his promise. His name—his great and terrible name—is dishonoured forever in the sight of men and angels if he fail to fulfil this word which is past and cannot be recalled,—"God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Such is the Scripture account. If it be false, you have an easy way to detect its falsehood; if true, it is in your power to convince yourself of its truth. Put to the test this bold assertion. Ask your heavenly Father to give you his Holy Spirit. If your prayer be granted, the Bible, with all its rich proffers of present peace and eternal happiness, will become your portion and reward forever. If, on the contrary, your *ardent, persevering* prayers should bring down no supplies of light and knowledge from above, then you may not only with great justice pronounce the Bible to be an impudent imposture, but you will be justified in doubting whether there be any God at all.

I would press this upon you, because *no external evidence*, however satisfactory, is of itself sufficient to produce conviction. The proof must be written by the finger of God upon your heart. It must be the result of your own actual and personal experience. "No man can say" from the heart "that Jesus is the Lord, *but by the Holy Ghost.*" If you believe in Jesus, it must be because God has revealed Jesus in your soul. This revelation is promised by God to all that ask him. Upon slighter grounds you ought not to believe such

momentous truths. With less than this you ought not to be satisfied. Permit me, before I quit this subject, to urge you, by a few unanswerable arguments, to put the Bible to this test. The task might almost appear superfluous; but the perverseness of the human heart is beyond conception, and requires to be combated where it would be least suspected of resistance.

First, then, I would remark to you that there is something in this saying which stamps on it an air of conscious honesty and veracity. An artful person would hardly have committed himself so grossly. A liar would have hesitated to expose himself to such immediate detection. An impostor would not willingly have courted such close examination. Those who forge the current coin of the realm are the least likely to furnish us with a method of distinguishing the counterfeit. If I wished to palm upon you a fictitious account of any person, that person himself would surely be the last to whom I should choose to refer you for the truth of my account. Still more absurd would such a reference be if I knew that it was in the power of the said person instantly to detect and expose my falsehood. But the Bible gives you an account of God, and then refers you to God himself for the confirmation of that account. Nor is this one of those ranting, contemptible appeals to the Deity with which men will sometimes seek to cloak their falsehood or to vent their enthusiasm. It is a calm, sober, deliberate assurance, founded on the benevolence and

wisdom of the Divine Being. Foreseeing all the doubts and difficulties which would obstruct the reception of his gospel, Jesus himself vouchsafes to point out a ready way of arriving at the truth. He founds his arguments on the strongest and most universal principles of natural religion. Would you know whether he is indeed a teacher sent from God? He refers you to God himself for an answer. He declares to you that you cannot believe him to be the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. At the same time, *he solemnly promises that this Holy Spirit shall be given to you upon your asking.*

Try, now, whether he is able to keep his promise or no. Whoever God is, he will not refuse to instruct you at your request. Or, should he refuse, he will not at least lend himself to delude and ensnare you. Jesus tells you that his doctrine is the bread of life. Should it, on the contrary, prove to be nothing better than a stone or scorpion, be assured that your heavenly Father will not force it upon you, when you ask him for bread.

The next remark I would offer for your consideration is, that, however secure you may think yourself in your rejection of Christianity, it is *possible* you may be mistaken. I say, *it is possible that you may, after all, be in the wrong.* Not all your security can reach so far as to preclude this possibility; and what an eternity of despair does it involve! Your judgment is not infallible. If you think you have no proof that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, you know assuredly that you have no proof to the

contrary. A mistake here is no trifling matter. You had better play the fool on any other subject than on this; for should things turn out contrary to your expectations, you will bitterly curse your own folly. The idiot, the madman, may sport with this tremendous uncertainty. But the wise man will consider every possible contingency. I repeat, that it is possible your contempt of the Bible may be unfounded. Place this as far off as you are able, still you cannot deny that it is *possible.*

Reflect now, I beseech you, on another possibility, which hangs on the one I have just mentioned. *It is* POSSIBLE *that you may one day stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Should* such an event take place, what excuse will you offer for having rejected the gospel, when Jesus himself pointed out to you so simple and unfailing a test of its truth? Will you not stand condemned even in your own eyes? Will not conscience upbraid you with the incredible infatuation with which you refused to give the word of God a fair trial? Say, will not your rejection of the test I now offer you, if—which God forbid! —you do reject it, will not this be a dreadful aggravation of your crime? You cannot plead ignorance, when knowledge was offered you at so easy a rate. You cannot plead uncertainty, when so ready a way of solving every doubt was pointed out to you by Him who will then be your Judge. You might have asked and received. You might have sought and found. Then will you justly be left to ask and to seek in vain. Now Christ says, "Ask, and it shall

be given unto you." Reject his offer, and this very word which he has spoken to you shall judge you in that day.

Not only will you *then* appear without excuse before God, but, whether the Bible be true or false, if you refuse to try it by this criterion you are *now* without excuse before men and your own conscience. Such a refusal speaks for itself. It says, "I love darkness rather than light; I will not come to the light, lest my deeds should be reproved."[1] It "says to the Almighty, 'Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.'"[2] Such conduct is not founded in *reason;* for reason forbids us to condemn what we have not tried. It is not supported by *philosophy;* for it is *her* character to use every possible means for the discovery of truth and the detection of error. It is not consistent with *honesty;* for what can be more dishonest than to plead the absence of sufficient proof as a reason for not believing, and yet, when that proof is offered, to decline taking the necessary steps for its attainment! It is easy to perceive the secret spring of a refusal, which is equally incompatible with the dictates of reason, philosophy, and honesty. You do not *wish* to have your prejudices removed. You would rather not know any thing about Him that made you. Self is your idol; and how can you desire to become acquainted with One whose presence in your soul would destroy all self-pleasing and self-exaltation forever?

[1] See John iii. 19, 20. [2] See Job xxi. 14.

However, we have a right to expect that, if you will not make TRIAL of the truth of Christ's word, you will at once confess that all your boasted candour and philosophy were mere pretences, held forth to conceal the foul reality of your enmity against God. Till you have tried this test, the terms fanaticism and delusion may with far greater reason be used to designate your rejection, than our belief, of Christianity.

Again, supposing the Bible to be false, you *lose nothing* by having brought it to this touchstone. The trial, if it should fail, will but leave you just as you were before. Nay, it will be so far an advantage, that you will have the pleasure of detecting a barefaced fraud, and will be effectually freed from those secret misgivings which you cannot now altogether exclude.

On the other hand, if the Scriptures be true, *how immensely will you gain* by the experiment! Instead of a few vague, ill-defined notions of God, you will be able to say, "I *know* in whom I have believed;" "this God is *my* God for ever and ever;"[1] your short-lived snatches of unholy mirth will be exchanged for "a joy with which no stranger intermeddleth;"[2] your cold and sullen fortitude, for a peace which the world can neither give nor take away; your comfortless prospect of annihilation, for a hope full of immortality.

The last consideration I shall urge upon you is, that *this is the only fair test by which the Bible can*

[1] 2 Tim. i. 12; Psalm xlviii. 14. [2] Prov. xiv. 14.

be tried. For if you refuse to be guided by this criterion there is but one other to which you can possibly recur. You may, if you please, bring the Scriptures to the bar of human reason, and reject them, because you find many things you do not comprehend, and many that you do not approve. But these grounds of rejection are insufficient.

For, in the first place, if the Bible be true, its author is God. Now, there is between your mind and the mind of God an inconceivable distance. It is extremely probable that many things may appear to his infinitely comprehensive understanding in a light totally different from that in which they are viewed by your narrow and limited reason. To use the words of the Bible itself, it is possible that "God's ways may not be as your ways, nor his thoughts as your thoughts."[1] If, then, *his* book should turn out to be somewhat different from the Bible *you* would have written, I really do not see that this is a sufficient reason for rejecting it. Consider the vast difference of ideas which inequality of intellect creates between two beings of the same nature,—a child and a man. Set before a little child the Elements of Euclid or the Principia of Newton. Will they not be foolishness to him? Or, present him with the last debates in the houses of Parliament, and request his opinion upon the disputed point,—the justness of the arguments in its favour, or the force of those that were opposed to it. Is he capable of forming a correct estimate of these

[1] Isaiah lv. 8.

things? But they are matters that do not immediately concern him. Well, then, let me propose that you acquaint him with the plans you may have formed for his education and fortune; the studies he will have to pursue, with their different degrees of usefulness; the snares that will be laid for his youth, and the anxieties that await his manhood. When you have finished your statement, let the young reasoner be called upon to give his ideas on the subject, and point out how far your remarks meet with his approval. All this appears very absurd to you. But it is without comparison more absurd to fancy yourself capable of judging of the authenticity of God's word by its agreement or disagreement with your own most imperfect notions.

Notwithstanding the child's incapacity of judgment, he is, in one respect, a better reasoner than yourself. Strange and unaccountable as your sentiments must sometimes appear to him, he does not therefore reject them as absurd or untrue. He knows that it is owing to the imperfection of his own mind that things appear so differently to him from what they do to you. This feeling sense of his own inferiority is his best preservative from error. But you cannot bring yourself to confess that the judgment of God may often differ exceedingly from your judgment, nay, that they may be directly contrary the one to the other. You cannot condescend to be inferior to God, and to learn of God,—submitting your mind to his as a little child submits his mind to the mind of his father.

Yet between the understanding of the child and the man there is no such great difference. It is but the distance between finite and finite, between worm and worm. Between man and God, between finite and infinite, between the mind that thinks and the mind that *creates* thought, who shall calculate the difference? It is immeasurable, incomprehensible. Imagination would grasp at the idea, but it is too mighty for her. We can but express it by another incommensurable distance:—"surely as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's thoughts higher than our thoughts, and his ways than our ways."[1] Poor, pitiful, narrow-minded creatures that we are! If God does but give to one of our fellow-creatures a mind a few degrees larger than our own, we can scarcely judge of or appreciate that mind, by reason of our own mean and short-sighted prejudices. Yet we presume to think of measuring the Infinite,—of comprehending the incomprehensible mind of God! We bring the Omniscient down to the bar of human judgment, and insist upon his expressing himself according to our petty and varying notions of propriety!

It is not, then, any argument against a book said to be written by God, if it should contain many things above, and some apparently contrary to, the reason of man. For we are infinitely less capable of judging of what ought or ought not to be the mind of God than an infant is to decide upon the

[1] See Isaiah lv. 9.

thoughts and counsels of the most eminent statesman or philosopher.

But you will perhaps reply, that, supposing you had written a book expressly for the use of your child, you would have taken care to accommodate it to his capacity; and that it is reasonable in like manner to infer that, if God had written a book expressly for our use, he would have stooped to the narrowness of our understandings. I admit the justice of your inference. But permit me to make another supposition. Put the case that you had written a book for your child's use, and that you were to warn him beforehand that he would find many things too difficult for his unassisted comprehension; which things, if he would ask you, you would render perfectly intelligible to him. Would the child then have reason to complain that the meaning of the book was obscure to him? Surely not. Now, this is what the Bible assures you that God has done. He has written a book for the use of men, which, by reason of their imperfect and incorrect views, they cannot of themselves understand. He has told them that if they will ask of him he will make it plain and intelligible to them. Whether this account be true or false can only be ascertained by making the experiment. It seems at least worth trying.

But, again, we have two books besides, which we know can have no other author than God,—the book of Creation and the book of Providence. Do these contain nothing difficult to be under-

stood, nothing that we cannot easily reconcile with our ideas? Rather, do we not meet with obscurities and apparent contradictions in every page?

Is not the book of Nature incomprehensible? How unaccountable to our ideas that the burying of a dry, diminutive seed should be followed by its resurrection in the shape of a lovely flower or a stately tree! How strange, that one day should behold the lifeless caterpillar wrapped in a winding-sheet of its own making, and the next should present it to us winged with life and beauty, the gayest of the fluttering creation! There is not in the whole book of Nature a single line that is legible to us from beginning to end. We can read enough to wonder and adore, but not enough to understand.

And as for the book of Providence, are not its contents still more dark and mysterious? Does it not contain ten thousand articles which to our weak judgment appear absolutely inconsistent and contradictory? How often are the righteous visited with one affliction after another, while the wicked are not in trouble as other men! "They are full of substance, and leave the rest of their treasure to their babes;" but the righteous are poor and oppressed. These are some of the seeming incongruities of the book of Providence. They are by no means the most remarkable. To us it often appears a string of paradoxes.

If, now, a third book be offered to us, even the Bible, professing also to be from God, shall we deny that it is genuine merely because it is marked by

the *very same* peculiarities of style which distinguished the other works of the same Author? Surely this remarkable coincidence of style is any thing rather than an *objection* to its authenticity.

When you object to the Bible on the ground of its being opposed to your *reason*, we have yet another cause to doubt whether reason is at all to be relied on in the matter. For if you look round upon all the kingdoms of the earth, and observe the absurd, degrading notions which men entertain of the Deity, you will perceive that the human mind is little capable of forming sublime or even reasonable notions concerning him. As you too profess to be guided by unassisted reason, you can scarcely be sure that your ideas of God may not be just as remote from the truth as those of the ignorant savage who says to a stone, "Thou art my God." You will tell me that you have the superior advantages of an enlightened philosophy and a cultivated intellect. I fear this argument will not stand you in much stead. For what were those gods who, in the opinion of the enlightened and cultivated nations of Greece and Rome, "in high Olympus ruled the middle air"? They were a set of mere men,—loose and unprincipled men,—with rather more than human power, and less than human virtue. These enlightened and philosophical nations conceived "that God was altogether such an one as themselves." If your ideas are more rational than theirs, it is not because you are naturally better informed than they were, but because some of your

notions have been refined from the grossness of their sensuality by that despised system of theology, the Bible. Their example may warn you how little *reason* can avail us in searching after the Almighty. A few of the wisest of them perceived that they were wrong, but confessed that all their philosophy was insufficient to find out what was right. With these the Maker of the universe, if not Jupiter or Saturn, was still "the unknown God." Yet they had the same reason to guide them, the same helps (unless you will acknowledge the Bible to be a help), that you have in the present day. Can you tell us why you should hope to succeed where they so egregiously failed? Reason, in the case of every nation in the world, has proved a blind guide: can you tell us how it comes to pass that she should, in your individual case, prove so wonderfully clear-sighted? May not the ideas of God which reason has taught you be just as wide of the truth as her suggestions to the heathen nations whom she persuaded to "change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things"?[1] And if you cannot be sure of the correctness of your notions, is it safe to reject the Bible, merely because it does not coincide with those notions?

Once more: if you repeat that you cannot believe the Bible, because its contents appear absurd and contradictory to you, we reply, that *this is no more*

[1] See Romans i. 23.

than the Bible itself has foretold. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are *foolishness* unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[1] Let me again put the case home to your own experience. Suppose you had written a treatise on some particular subject, and had distinctly and repeatedly declared that, to a certain description of readers destitute of a certain degree of information, your book must, from the very nature of the thing, be incomprehensible, and even wear an appearance of glaring absurdity. Would you not think yourself unfairly dealt by, if your performance were to fall into contempt because those very persons whom you had declared incompetent to judge were to assure the world that they had read it and found it both obscure and ridiculous? But let us further suppose that you had not only forewarned these people of the incapacity they laboured under, but had also pointed out a method by which they might acquire sufficient knowledge to enter into the meaning of your work and to estimate it at its real value. Would you not accuse them of tenfold disingenuousness in decrying your production, without giving themselves the trouble of examining it by the method you had proposed?

This disingenuous, this unphilosophical, proceeding is the very counterpart of your own conduct with regard to that book, upon which, for any thing you have yet proved to the contrary, your eternal

[1] See I Corinthians ii. 14.

happiness or misery may depend. The Scriptures offer themselves to you as the word of God. They assure you that sin has so blinded and depraved your reason that you are incapable of affixing a just meaning, or a true value, to their sacred contents, until that reason is informed and enlightened by the Spirit of God. They instruct you how to obtain this divine illumination:—"Ask, and it shall be given you."

Now, let us observe your mode of proceeding. You set about judging the Bible by that very faculty which the Bible has declared to be incapable of judging correctly. This you do in the face of the united testimony of every age and nation to the utter incapacity of reason as a guide to religion. You not only neglect, but absolutely despise, the offer which the Bible makes you of divine teaching, though common sense, common feeling, and experience concur in proclaiming its necessity. And then, with consummate assurance, you step forward and inform the world that you have *fairly examined* the Bible, and proved it to be a mere "cunningly-devised fable." Is this fair and open? Is it just and reasonable? Is it wise and judicious?

It appears, then, from the vast difference which must be supposed to exist between our minds and the mind of God,—from the analogies that we may gather from his Creation and Providence,—from the confusion and ignorance of the whole world respecting him, and from the account which the Bible

gives of its own nature and purpose, that the unassisted reason is not capable of deciding upon its truth or falsehood. The criterion is absolutely unfair and inapplicable, alike condemned by common sense and common honesty. A deaf man is no very accurate judge of sounds, nor is a blind man adapted to decide upon the merits of a picture. Even so is human reason utterly incapable of discerning the beauty and glory of the sacred page, until the same Almighty Power which created that reason is pleased to shine into and enlighten it. Now, if there is the smallest hope that so great a blessing may be had *for the asking*, what madness and perverseness will it argue on our parts to decline making the attempt!

That I may preclude every possibility of misapprehension, let me add a very few words as to the *nature* of this asking, or prayer, and the *answer* which may be expected to it.

And, first, as to the nature of prayer. I need hardly tell you that it must be *sincere*. No promise is made to the mere asking of the lips. You may *thus* ask wisdom of God, and, when he makes you no answer, you may triumphantly declare that the Scripture promise is broken. This may pass current with your fellow-men. But it will neither deceive yourself nor God. Conscience will bear witness that you have not *really* prayed. The Searcher of hearts is insulted by such lip-petitions. To grant them would be to part with his omniscience.

Nor is it enough that the desire after knowledge

be *sincere*. It must also be *fervent*. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the one without the other. For if we desire a thing in proportion to its value, then by how much the knowledge of God is better than any earthly knowledge, by so much ought the fervency with which we long for it to exceed the fervency of our desires after any earthly object. The soul that is really thirsting after her Maker, her God, the proper centre of her desires and hopes, will thirst after him with a degree of ardour and fixedness of which no earthly longing can convey an adequate idea. The hungry man, fainting for want of food,—the thirsty traveller, languishing for water,—these are but poor and inexpressive emblems of the soul that is hungering and thirsting after God. To desire God coldly, and other objects with eagerness, is such an inversion of the right order of things, it is so immensely to undervalue the only thing which cannot be prized too highly, that we can hardly without arrogance expect that God will condescend to such faint desires, or fulfil such lukewarm petitions. I believe that the faintest wish, *if sincere*, will not pass unnoticed by Him who "despiseth not the day of small things." But if our longings after such an unspeakable good be not intensely excited, we have every reason to question their sincerity. To desire God without intenseness seems more inconsistent than not to desire him at all. We may desire a trifle faintly; for our wish is in proportion to its value. But to desire the living God, the Original of all wisdom, excellence,

beauty, glory, and felicity, and yet not to burn and throb with uncontrollable longings of the soul after Him, this is an anomaly which can only be met with in a guilty and fallen world, and it proves at how low a rate the very best and wisest of mankind do value God. The Spirit of God must both excite and satisfy this longing. The more we ask, the more we shall desire, and the more we shall be satisfied.

I conceive, then, that this asking implies sincere and *fervent* desire. It is the asking of the *heart*, and to such *only* is the promise made. "*Then* shall ye seek me, and find me, *when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*"[1]

Suffer me now to direct your attention for a moment to the *answer* which may be expected to such asking as I have described. On this head I have two brief cautions to offer to you.

1. You have a right to expect a *convincing* answer to your prayers, but you have no reason to expect that it will be *miraculous*. I do not mean to say that God cannot, if he please, convince you by a miracle. This, however, is not his ordinary method of dealing with his creatures. He who once brought light out of darkness with the word, "Let there be light," now sends forth "the sun every morning like a bridegroom out of his chamber,"[2] and he gives light to all the world in the ordinary course of nature. So He, who caused the first beams of the Sun of righteousness to shine miraculously upon mankind, now illuminates the hearts of men by the

[1] Jer. xxix. 13.

[2] See Psalm xix. 4, 5.

ordinary process of inward, rational conviction. It is fitting that it should be so. We are reasonable creatures, and our *understandings* must be convinced ere our *hearts* can be converted. No outward miracle can effect this, but only the inward miracle of opening the heart to attend and the mind to understand; of dispelling the dark mists of ignorance, prejudice, and error that benight the soul, and, above all, of abolishing that enmity to God, which is the secret and bitter root of all unbelief. Perhaps what I am now saying seems strange and mysterious to you. I will enter no further into the subject. Only try the experiment I have proposed to you, and you will understand all this, and much more.

I would, in the second place, caution you not to expect an *immediate* answer to your prayers. Here, again, we may gather from the analogy of God's dealings with us in temporal things some idea of what we are to expect from him in spiritual things. Every process in the works of Nature and in the development of mind is carried on by slow and sometimes imperceptible degrees. We sow our seed, but we must wait with patience till His sun and His rain have brought it to perfection. Yet we do not the less confidently expect an abundant crop because we know that it will not spring up in a single night. Again, in acquiring any of the arts and sciences, how many tedious processes we have to pass through! Yet we are not so foolish as to throw them aside in despair because we cannot master them in a few hours. And, reasoning from analogy,

we have no ground to expect that the knowledge of God will be the growth of an hour, or that so mighty a blessing will be showered down at the very first request we deign to offer. Consider, I beseech you, how long God has been waiting upon you with this invitation. Wonder not if he keep you waiting for a time in your turn. But this will be as he pleases. I only mention it lest any who have really begun to pray should feel discouraged at perceiving no immediate benefit from their prayers. God has nowhere promised to answer us so suddenly. But he will not keep us waiting without bestowing on us so much light and strength as will encourage us to persevere. "Oh, tarry, then, the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."[1]

I close this part of my subject with the advice of the prophet, "Halt no longer between two opinions." If the Jehovah of the Scriptures be God, serve him; but if the God whom Deists have fancied to themselves be God, then serve him. I have pointed out to you a way of deciding the question. Bring the Scriptures to the touchstone of truth. "THE GOD WHO ANSWERS PRAYER, LET HIM BE GOD."[2]

"Ask, and it shall be given you." Ask *sincerely, fervently, perseveringly.* If you *thus* ask, and receive not, I consent that you shall renounce the Bible forever. If you ask, and receive, then will the Bible become your everlasting heritage, the very joy and rejoicing of your heart. Then will you bless the day that led you to the "Test of Truth."

[1] Psalm xxvii. 14. [2] 1 Kings xviii. 21–24.

PART II.

LUKE xi. 9.

ASK, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU.

I CANNOT behold a person who doubts or disbelieves the truth of Christianity, without feeling drawn towards that person with a tender and pitying interest, as if he were my brother or dear friend. My heart is linked to his by an irresistible sympathy. Should this appear mysterious, I can easily explain the mystery. I have been in the same situation myself. I "know the heart" of an unbeliever; his doubts, his objections, his disgusts, have all passed through my own mind. I enter into every particular of his feelings. If he is a *sincere* doubter,—I mean, if he really desires to find out the truth,—I can comprehend all the agony of suspense, the horror of approaching eternity in the dark, which he now experiences, and which none but those who have felt can figure to themselves, even in idea. But my sympathy with such a doubter is also one of glad anticipation. I enter into his *future* feelings, and rejoice in the light and peace which are certainly prepared for him, though now they are hid from his eyes. I know that "an

understanding shall one day be given him, that he may know Him that is true." "If any man wishes to do the will of God, *he shall know of the doctrine*, whether it be true, or whether Jesus Christ spake of himself."[1] Of this I am assured, both because it is God's promise, and because he has fulfilled that promise to me. "He has brought me out of the horrible" abyss of doubt and unbelief, "and set my foot upon a rock, and established my goings." And oh that, while I endeavour to speak of his goodness towards me, "many may see it, and fear, and put their trust in the Lord!"[2]

I thank my God that I have been permitted, by bitter experience, to enter into this growing calamity of my fellow-men. Not only have the doctrines of Christianity been stamped upon my soul with a certainty greatly enhanced by the strict and suspicious scrutiny to which they have every one been subjected, but an intenseness is added to my prayers, and a liveliness to my hopes, for this class of wanderers from God, which nothing but a fellowship in sin and suffering could have produced. I can spread their miserable case before the Lord with the happy conviction that the same power which was displayed on my behalf is ready to be stretched out on theirs. And when unbelief whispers, *Can* these men be brought to the knowledge of the truth? my very soul burns within me, as I appeal to my own experience, that nothing is too hard for the Lord. May the Lord my God guide my heart and my pen, whilst I attempt

[1] John vii. 17.

[2] See Psalm xl. 1–3.

to delineate the process by which "he called me out of darkness into his marvellous light!"

My chief aim is to demonstrate the success which will invariably follow a sincere and candid application of the "Test of Truth." If I can persuade others to try the same method, I shall have gained my point. I seek not to answer objections. They are innumerable as the turnings and windings of the human heart. Even with those who are sincere in their search after truth, the most trivial of these objections, though confuted again and again, will present itself with renewed difficulty. The *source* of doubts and objections must be dried up. The "evil heart of unbelief" must be removed. He who will make trial of the "Test of Truth" shall have a ready answer to all objections. He shall know by *his own experience* that every word of the Bible is true.

To you, doubters and unbelievers of every description, I address myself. Many of you will esteem me a fool for my pains. I am content that you should think thus of me, so long as the wisdom of God is foolishness in your eyes. But my God often "chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise." This emboldens me to hope that, if you will give me a candid and patient hearing, I may, with his blessing, be able to suggest some reflections which may prove useful to you. As God has opened my understanding, so I believe that he is able and willing to open yours. If once he shine into your dark hearts, how will un-

belief and pride and prejudice give way before the brightness of his presence! How joyfully will you submit to those deep counsels of God which you now cast from you with scorn! I did not learn them of myself; neither can you. "Flesh and blood cannot reveal them unto you;" but my Father and *your Father*, which is in heaven, both can and will, if you desire it of him. I look with confidence on your behalf to Him whose office it is to "lead the blind by a way that they knew not; to make darkness light before them, and crooked paths straight."[1]

From a very early age my mind had been deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of religion. I knew something not only of the form, but of the *spirit*, of prayer. With a very indistinct view of many of the doctrines of Christianity, I was yet enabled to walk with God in sincerity, and without any considerable declension, during the greater part of my childhood, and the commencement of a riper age.

Nor can I now speak decidedly as to the time or manner in which a kind of careless stupidity about every thing connected with religion began to steal over my soul. When this first became perceptible, it occasioned me great uneasiness. But I soon forgot it in the studies and vanities incident to my age. Ere long, I had learned to live "without God in the world," to shut him out of all my thoughts. Pride and self-love, which had, I doubt not, long been secretly undermining the *vitality* of my religion,

[1] Isaiah xlii. 16.

now became the motives—the allowed and cherished motives—of all my actions. My former feelings were at first remembered as an indistinct dream, then wiped as with a sponge from my memory. It may appear strange that one who had ever tasted the power of religion could so soon cast off its influence; for all this was effected in the space of a few months. It *is* strange; and it affords a proof of the strange depravity of the human heart when left to its own workings. Yet, as this book may come under the eye of some who have fallen in the same manner, I will, for their sakes, endeavour briefly to trace the origin of my declension. Similar causes may have operated in producing theirs.

I think that I had no sufficient view of the nature and universality of sin. The sin of particular actions and thoughts would often affect me very deeply. But I had little idea of the general sinfulness of my nature and of my own utter helplessness, or at least that idea had for some time been growing very indistinct. In consequence, I set my guard, as it were, against this or that particular sin, instead of taking the whole body of sin to God to be subdued and destroyed. I am inclined to believe that other young persons besides myself have derived injury from some parts of a work which has, on the whole, been eminently useful: I mean Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul." I had read in that work, long before the period of my thorough declension, an earnest recommendation to the young convert to enter into a solemn

covenant with God by a written form or dedication. I drew up an instrument of this kind, and fancied I had bound myself to God's service in such a way that I could now never forsake him. But when I found myself daily coming short of the resolutions I had made, I began to be filled with a kind of slavish dread of God; I could no longer come before him as his child. I felt as if I had, by breaking my own voluntary covenant, dissolved or weakened the bond which united me to him. Again and again I sought his presence, and with tears renewed my engagements; but every renewal of this formal dedication was made under circumstances of fresh discouragement, and with diminished confidence in the strength of Christ to carry me through the performance of it. Thus I gradually declined from the law of liberty into the spirit of bondage and fear. I believe that these ineffectual struggles paved the way for my apparently sudden and unaccountable dereliction. Whenever self-dependence creeps in, there is reason to expect that we shall be left to discover that self is a broken reed, which can but pierce and betray the hand that trusts to it for support.

But I purposely hasten over this period, the mention of which was necessary to throw some light over the future part of my narrative. The state of things I have described could not last long. I became dissatisfied with the pleasures and pursuits in which I had promised myself so much gratification, and began again to wish to turn to religion

for comfort. But, alas! I had no longer a religion. I had refused to give glory unto the Lord my God; now "my feet" were left to "stumble upon the dark mountains." I had forsaken the Rock of my strength. I was now to try the firmness of my own sandy foundation.

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ had before been occasionally a source of doubt and perplexity to me. It now became odious to my proud heart and utterly shocking to my carnal reason. To satisfy myself on this point, I examined the Bible again and again. The result was an entire conviction, that, if there were any truth in the Bible, Jesus Christ was the self-existent Jehovah. But so great was the difficulty I had in consenting to this doctrine, that I immediately began to doubt *whether there were any truth in the Bible.* I suspected that a system of religion which involved such apparent absurdities could not possibly come from God. Determined to sift the matter to the utmost, I eagerly acquainted myself with the arguments for and against Christianity. My *understanding* was convinced that the Scriptures were divine. But my *heart* refused to receive the conviction. *I was unwilling to believe.* The more my reason was compelled to assent to their truths, the more I secretly disliked the doctrines of the Bible.

At length I resolved for the present to lay aside the subject altogether. I persuaded myself that there must be many flaws in the evidence for so strange a history, and that, if I had not as yet pene-

tration to discover those flaws, it was only on account of my youth and the immaturity of my reasoning powers. It may be thought that my former religious sentiments would leave behind them a relish and inclination for the tenets of Christianity. On the contrary, they seem to form a great, an insuperable obstacle. It is evident, thought I, that I have hitherto been living under the unresisted dominion of prejudice. These opinions were imbibed before I could possibly form any judgment upon their truth or falsehood. I have ever since blindly submitted to their guidance, endeavouring to feel or to fancy all that the advocates of enthusiasm told me I ought to feel. I must guard against this bias which my early associations have induced. From the very same cause I should probably in another country have stood forth the zealous worshipper of Brahma or the furious disciple of Mohammed. Thus I reason with myself. Alas! I knew not then that the secret, yet determined, bias of my heart was *against* Christianity. I had forgotten that "the carnal mind is enmity against God."

I looked then upon my former devotion as the dream of an idle superstition. This circumstance was perpetually recurring to my memory, and redoubled my suspicions of the creed in which I had been brought up; so that, humanly speaking, there was no system of religion which had so little hope of a candid examination from me as the Bible. I will not at least be the slave of prejudice. I will not wear these trammels merely because they were

imposed upon me in my childhood. I will think and examine for myself.

The following considerations constrained me from communicating my perplexity to a single being. In the first place, I thought that to whomsoever I might open my mind on the subject, they would not fail to endeavour to bias me one way or the other. In the next, as I was not quite sure that the Scriptures were false, I feared to be the means of raising or confirming doubts in the mind of any other person, lest I should ultimately discover that I had been fighting against God. I therefore resolved to keep my own counsel; to exhibit, for the present, no outward difference of conduct, only avoiding, as much as possible, the discussion of religious subjects. In the mean time, I determined to devote myself to those studies which tend most eminently to invigorate the reasoning faculties and give to the mind a habit of sound thinking and correct judgment. Thus I hoped some future day to renew the examination, take a clearer view of things, and effectually guard against being made the dupe of a "cunningly-devised fable." Vain and presumptuous fool! I had yet to learn that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and that man cannot, by "his own unassisted searching, find out the Almighty to perfection."[1] Yet even in this circumstance I would gratefully recognize the wisdom and the goodness that have followed me all my life long; for though my studies were now but an addi-

[1] See 1 Cor. iii. 19; Job xi. 7.

tional snare to me, yet they afterwards, under God's blessing, were of considerable use to me in my researches after truth, or, rather, in enabling me to detect the fallacies which had misled me. But at present I was trusting in them; and how could they be otherwise than a curse to me?

These abstruse pursuits had an effect on my mind which I had not anticipated, but which at the time occasioned me little regret. I began to delight in them so much for their own sake that they withdrew my mind altogether from the grand subject of my inquiry. Instead of using them as a preparative for future examination, I fled to them as a refuge from the busy speculations which had so long tormented me. I buried thought in them as the drunkard buries it in his cups: not that I could at all times shut out serious reflection. These fits of mental intoxication had their intervals, and bitter intervals they were. But I pacified conscience with the plea that I was only laying aside present inquiry to resume it under more favourable circumstances. *When* I should deem myself fit for the momentous scrutiny was a point reserved for decision at some indefinite period. On one or two occasions I experienced a return of religious feeling, and felt inclined to submit, though with the temper of a slave rather than of a child, to the yoke of the gospel. But at these times a temporary dread of consequences, or that undefinable softness of mind which affliction induces, operated much more than any heartfelt conviction of the

truth. I sought to appease conscience by doing many things. I was busy, but not devotional, and my fit of ill-judged zeal soon evaporated.

With the exception of these transient interruptions, I continued this course for many months; but at length God in mercy arrested my downward progress, and the reflections of a few hours produced a total revolution in my views and desires, though I was yet to wait a long time ere I arrived at the knowledge of the truth. I had been looking out on the starry heavens, and from the consideration of these wondrous luminaries was naturally led to reflect on the immense stretch of intellect by which man has been enabled to make them the objects of his knowledge,—to measure the distances, the orbits, the circumferences, of the planets,—to trace the eccentric path of the comet and foretell the period of its return. In an instant—with the rapidity, but not with the transientness, of the lightning's flash—the thought broke in upon me, "*What signifies the knowledge of all these things, so long as man knows not God who made him?*"

I had never sunk so low in the scale of being as to entertain a suspicion that I could exist without some great Intelligent Cause of my existence; and yet the conviction that there was a God now seemed to flash upon me for the first time. It was as though I had gotten a new idea, and a new sense to perceive it by; and this idea was so tremendously awful and important that it wellnigh overwhelmed me. The amazing folly and brutish stupidity of

mankind, and of myself in particular, in taking pains to acquaint ourselves with the works of God, and yet crawling on in contented ignorance of God himself, appeared so utterly shocking to common sense and common decency, that I could scarcely believe my own existence in such a world, and amongst such a race of fellow-madmen, to be any thing more than a frightful dream. At first, I could only behold the folly, narrowness, and meanness of my conduct. To have loved and sought what is beautiful in the creature, and yet not to have cared to be acquainted with the Original, the Fountain-head of beauty,—the Mind, from whence every form of loveliness emanated, and which must itself be the perfection of beauty; to have admired the grand and sublime, without casting a thought upon Him whose mind is the birthplace of sublimity and grandeur; to have dwelt with rapture on the wisdom of my fellow-creatures, without seeking to know Him who gave them this general wisdom, as a little drop out of the infinite ocean; to have examined and pored upon the workings of my own intellect, without inquiring after the Father of intellects,—"the God of the spirits of all flesh,"—and to have admired the exquisite formation of the body, without asking by *Whom it* was "so fearfully and wonderfully made;" to have forgotten the Giver in his gifts,—the Creator in a minute portion of his works; to have embraced the shadow, and rejected the substance,—idolized the copy, and despised the original,—provided for time, and neglected eternity! Could

a creature so grovelling, so alive to all that is petty and mean, and so wrapped in a dull and senseless indifference to all that is great and worthy,—could this creature be styled a rational, a thinking being? And was this *man*, in whose exalted intelligence I had but now been glorying? Oh, far more gross than the brutes which perish! For the "very ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;" but man hath an owner, a master, a Creator,—and he knows nothing about him, and he is *content* to know nothing about him! If the works of creation be so beautiful and glorious, how surpassing in beauty and glory must be the God of creation! The mind which created my mind, and myriads of other minds,—and which, still unexhausted, is ready to produce myriads more,—is this mind worth knowing? or is it not worth knowing? or, rather, who but an idiot would care greatly about knowing any thing else? How low, how impertinent, how wide of the purposes, are the pretended dissertations of men upon truth and wisdom and knowledge! Why do they not seek truth and wisdom and knowledge in Him in whom they all centre? Why seek them in the little streamlets of the world, when they might go to the Ocean, the Fountain, the Original? Do men *know* that there is a God? Have they the slightest suspicion of the fact? Can they know, and not care? Can they suspect, and not lay all things aside till they have ascertained? Can they think or talk of any thing else so long as this point remains undecided?

But what have I myself been about all this time? How is it that I am but now beginning to ask, "Where is God my Maker?" I feel my want of God as though it were a new thing, as though I might not have known all along that this was the great, the only, want of a rational creature. It seems as if a thick mist had passed from before my eyes; as if, after a long and dreadful madness, I were just restored to sanity. And surely it must be thus. I have been labouring under a madness, a delusion; now I am awakened to a perception of the object of my existence. God is the object of my existence. There is nothing worth knowing, there is nothing worth caring for, but God. Oh that I knew how to find out God!

But while I was thus looking back with amazement at the folly of my conduct, another and a more appalling reflection came to deepen my perplexity. This was the *wickedness* of my conduct. My unnatural and monstrous ingratitude stared me in the face. If there be a God, then to endeavour to know and love and obey him must be not only the happiness, but the indispensable duty, of his creature. The ties of blood, the dearest relations and amities of life, must be a mere cobweb thread compared with the ties which ought to bind the soul formed to Him who formed it,—the relationship which must be naturally supposed to exist between the created and the creating Spirit. Have I not done my utmost to sever those ties? Have I loved God? Alas! how could I love an unknown being?

But have I *tried* to know him? What were my former endeavours? Let me not mock God by calling them endeavours. They deserve not to be once named as the act of a soul aspiring after its God. My life should have been one continued act of obedience and thankfulness; but I have scarcely thought of inquiring into his commands, or of reflecting upon his mercies. The true object and motive and centre of my soul must certainly be the love of my Creator. But I have, in some way or other, lost sight of this, and found out for myself an object, a motive, a centre, altogether sordid and abominable, and this is no other than the love of self. If I have never broken out into any open wickedness, if I have kept up a tolerably correct and amiable appearance to my friends, it has been solely owing (at least for many months past) to a sense of shame, or an inordinate self-esteem. This taught me to put on a fair and decent outside; but within all was hollowness. The inward abominations of my heart have been indulged without a scruple. I have drunk up *heart*-iniquity like water. If I have hitherto escaped the reproaches of an accusing conscience, it has been because this same principle of self, while it rendered me exceedingly sharp-sighted to the defects of others, blinded me to my own.

I now clearly perceived two things: that sin was the cause of all the misery in the world; and that the essence of sin, however different in kind or degree, was the same, and consisted in a general

habit of averseness or alienation from the great Author of our being. Moreover, I saw that this sin pervaded every particle of our natures and every moment of our lives. The mere moralist appeared to me the most daring sinner, the most senseless inverter of things. For he presumes to boast of his performance of the little duties of life, while the great duty, *the one duty*, is left out of the account. How ridiculous to imagine that we can be good parents, children, subjects, when we are not good *creatures!* This is to suppose that a watch will go well when the main-spring is broken, or a stream flow when its source is dried up. Now the sins of my life seemed to pass in review before me. I perceived that their peculiar malignity consisted in this, that they proceeded from a soul regardless of its Maker. Let what would be the action, enmity to God was the sin of it. My acts of unkindness and neglect to my fellow-men struck me as so many demonstrations of despite or indifference to Him who gave them being. It was not as they were *my* fellow-creatures, but as they were *His* creatures, that I was bound to love them and bear with them and do them good. Had I loved the Creator, my love to his creatures would have been a matter of course. "Against *thee*, thee *only*, have I sinned!"[1] Against thee, my Maker, my Preserver, my benevolent Friend, my tender Father! Thou hast made me, and clothed me, and fed me, and given me a heart to love, a soul to think, and a mind to understand; but I have not

[1] Psalm li. 4.

loved thee, nor thought of thee, nor known thee! What wonder if the malignity that was rankling in my heart towards thee should sometimes break out towards thine offspring? for I now clearly perceive that I could never have disliked any thing of thine had I not had a secret dislike to thee. Of what good has my existence been to the world? None,—absolutely none. What has been the end of my actions? To gratify self. Have I secured this end, paltry and miserable as I now perceive it to be? No, certainly; my experience up to this moment wrings from me the bitter acknowledgment that I have succeeded only in making myself miserable. What, then, is the reason of my failure in the search after happiness? What can it be but this, that God, the essence and source of happiness, has been left out of my system? God alone is sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul which he has made; and I am destitute and empty of God.

But, judging of this great Being by the indications and glimmerings of the reason which he has lighted up within me, is it possible for a moment to entertain the thought that he can behold with complacency a creature like myself? Reason teaches me that he is just: otherwise, how could he govern the world which his consummate wisdom has created? If he be just, shall he not punish one who has lived in the neglect of the most obvious and indispensable obligations to him? My ignorance of him is no excuse; for conscience witnesses that it has been in some measure a contented

ignorance. I have not taken half the pains to know God that I have taken to know objects of trifling importance. My utmost efforts and desires have been so utterly incommensurate, I will not say, with the worthiness of the object (for that is past my conception), but even with the faint and imperfect ideas which I might have formed of its worthiness, that to plead them in excuse would be the highest aggravation of my crime. If, then, justice be one of God's attributes, that attribute must be engaged to punish any unnatural and parricidal attempt to banish him from his own creation,—to depose him from his natural supremacy over my heart. Nor can I hope to escape with a slight punishment. Justice consists, not only in awarding retribution, but in suiting it to the nature and degree of the offence. Mine is an *infinite* offence, committed against an infinite Being, to whom I was bound by infinite obligations. Shall not the retribution be infinite?

Besides, I have only to open my eyes, and look on what passes before them every day, to behold manifest tokens of the indignation of God against a "world that lieth in wickedness." Has he not hidden himself from our knowledge? Are we not all abandoned to a sort of natural blindness and ignorance of all that pertains to him, and can there be a more decisive indication of his displeasure? This earth,—who can help perceiving that it lies under circumstances of banishment and alienation from its Creator? Would God form beings capable

of knowing him, and then leave them in ignorance of him, unless they had in some way or other forfeited his favour? Do not the various contradictory religions with which the world is filled, prove it to be in a state of the grossest ignorance and uncertainty about God? What are all the infirmities and diseases which attack mankind but a proof that sin, besides having ruined and debased the soul, has deranged and withered the body? What are all the fierce altercations and demoniac passions which desolate the earth, and make it like hell, but a manifestation of the most just vengeance of God, which has left us to wreak our quarrel with him upon one another, so that one-half of the human race seems to be made for the scourge and executioners of the other half? What shall we say of death itself, but that it demonstrates our whole substance to be so contaminated, that it must be taken to pieces, and built up afresh, before it can be purged from the deadly contagion? Add to this, that the ordinary commerce and discourse of men prove them to have an internal consciousness that all is not right between God and their souls. When a hypocrite would invest himself with the semblance of religion, does it ever occur to him to put on an air of cheerfulness and hilarity? Does not the very inflection of his voice become whining and dolorous, as if that were the only tone suited to the occasion? Whence is this, but to accommodate himself to the general idea which men have of religion, that it is a burdensome and melancholy

thing? To what cause shall we attribute the almost universal prevalence of sacrifices in the heathen world? Whence could men derive the idea of propitiating God's favour by the slaughter of an innocent animal? Does not this custom imply the idea of an offended God? Does it not originate in a hidden sense of sin,—in those secret gnawings of conscience which exist in the breast of every human being, and which lead them to think of God as an angry God? as One whom it is necessary, by some means, to reconcile and appease?

But we may find ample proof of this fact without going out of Christian countries, or even out of the limited circle of our own friends. What occasions the prevalent idea that religion is a melancholy thing,—incompatible with youth and good spirits,—a subject of too gloomy a cast to be admitted into general conversation? Who has not witnessed the dead silence, the air of uneasiness and constraint, which the introduction of a serious reflection will sometimes spread over a whole company? What a woeful interruption to their hilarity! Politeness itself will scarcely restrain a contemptuous smile, or a bitter sarcasm, at the expense of the meddler who ventured to obtrude the offensive and ill-timed observation. He is directly marked as *not one of them;* and should he again attempt to introduce the subject he will be regarded, in every festive society, as an interloper. But, if we were *satisfied* that there was *peace between us and God*, the mention of religion could never be offensive or ill-timed, because

religion would then be nothing but the continual expression of mirth and gladness,—the chosen and ever-pleasing topic of our most joyous moments.

I have thrown my reflections into this brief order, without attempting to follow them out exactly as they occurred to me; which, at this distance of time, would be impossible. They darted in upon my mind—first one, and then another, and sometimes many of them together, with a rapidity and force which has made me since wonder that I retained the perfect possession of my senses; and yet with so much clearness, that the substance of them is now impressed on my memory with the distinctness of facts, rather than of thoughts. Nor can I say whether this train of thought was the work of one night; for the same reflections pursued me with little alteration for many days. These then, with many considerations of a similar nature, which I cannot now so distinctly recollect, but particularly the continual sense of my own gross ignorance and enormous corruption, filled me with the deepest distress, and compelled me to feel, to my great discomfort, that there was a separation—a quarrel between God and his creature. I found, in my heart, a contrariety to him which I was unable to repress. Again I asked myself—how shall I, a miserable reptile, sustain my controversy with the Omnipotent? or stay his avenging arm, which is ready to visit on me the whole weight of his just indignation? If I, who am accustomed to wickedness, and hardened in it, yet know enough of what is right to abhor and

despise myself, in what light must I appear to his all-holy and unclouded judgment? Put the case now—that he should be willing, without satisfaction required, to pass over my offences, to forgive me for what my own conscience (planted by him) condemns me. What would be the consequences of this clemency? I should no longer reverence or esteem him: ceasing to be just, he would cease to be God in my eyes. I can no more suppose God without justice, than I can suppose man without a soul. This attribute is essential to his character as Governor of the universe. I should despise a fellow-creature who should govern so unjustly and weakly as to suffer criminals to escape without paying the penalty due to their crimes. Such a one's laws would be trampled on, and his person treated with as little regard as was paid to the fabled log sent down by Jupiter.

Even then—upon the monstrous supposition that God, the just God, who has in so many ways manifested his indignation against sin, could, in my favour, be induced to slacken the reins of his government, and throw away the sceptre of his justice—I should gain nothing by this, but the galling sensation of being under the yoke of one not greatly better than myself, or at least quite incompetent to his high office as Judge of the whole earth.

On the other hand—if God punishes me, I am involuntarily led to fear and hate him. To love a being whose glory is concerned in my destruction, is impossible. How shall I reconcile these two

opposite ideas?—the justice and mercy of Him who is at once my Governor and Father! If God pardons my sins, he is not a *just God;* that is, he is no God at all. If he do *not* pardon sin, at least in those who desire to return to him, that is contrary to what *nature herself suggests to me* of his goodness and mercy. Each alternative is unspeakably appalling. To have to do with a God who weakly swerves from the demands of justice, or to be in the hands of one who, by letting justice have her perfect work, should shut the door of mercy upon mankind. Yet the former of these alternatives appeared to me incomparably the most dreadful! I had, within these few hours, acquired such a perception of the beauty of holiness, that the thought of an unholy God was worse than hell to me. I felt that I had rather God should pour out on me all the vials of his wrath, than that, carried away by an unworthy softness and weakness, he should forgive, and thereby encourage sin: for sin appeared to me in so odious a light, that if it could not be purged out of God's universe without the destruction of mankind, who by sinning had deranged its order and defaced its beauty, my soul was almost ready to acquiesce in the general destruction, and to perish in it, so that the order and beauty of God's universe might be restored. To undergo eternal punishment was horrible. To acknowledge an unholy God was more horrible!

Besides all this, I plainly perceived that, supposing even there were any means of restoration to God's favour, I should be continually falling from

it again, unless a total change were wrought in my whole temper and disposition. I saw not how this change was to be effected. I had experienced so much of the weakness of my best resolutions, that had an offer of pardon been held out to me upon the condition of promising not to offend again, I should not have dared to make that promise. Sin had "separated between me and my God." This sin was not an act which I could lay aside—a habit which I could shake off; but it was a nature. How was I to change my nature? God, who made me at first, could alone correct the dreadful disease, which had so mixed itself up with my whole constitution that it seemed to form part of myself. But to this God how should I apply? or what reason had I to hope that he would not leave me to the consequences of my own wilful rebellion?

In this dilemma it occurred to me, as a last expedient, to turn my attention once more to that despised book, which had been long laid aside as incapable of affording me the least relief. How different was the temper of my mind in which I now addressed myself to its perusal, from that in which I had read it in the commencement of my disbelief of Christianity! I was no longer a proud sophist, triumphing in the strength and penetration of human reason and in the comprehensiveness of human knowledge. The contemplation of my own ignorance, weakness, and wickedness, had laid my pride in the dust. My eyes were opened to view myself as I really was—depraved and blinded in my reason, judgment, and

understanding. And this is the process *which must take place in the soul of every man before he can pursue the search after truth in a right spirit.* He must "become a fool, that he may be wise:"[1] not that he must part with any portion of his rational faculties; but, having been a fool all his life long, he must be led to discover and acknowledge his foolishness, before he can so appreciate wisdom as to search for it with his whole heart.

My attention was soon powerfully drawn by the promises which abound in the Bible, that God will reveal himself to all those who diligently seek him. When I read these, it struck me that the Bible itself offered an infallible test, more sure than all the arguments that ever were written for and against it, to prove whether it was indeed the word of God or the word of man. To own the truth, I was at first startled by the unqualified nature of these promises. The authors of these books, if impostors—and which I still inclined to believe them—had pledged themselves in such an unguarded manner as must inevitably lead to their detection. Here is an engagement —or a pretended engagement—on God's part, to perform a miracle in favour of any one who chooses to ask it of him. For what can be a greater miracle than to give the knowledge of himself to a soul that is ignorant of him? This is the very essence and substance of all miracles. Other wonders and signs may be disputed. This *must* bring conviction. I cannot persuade myself that the Author of this book

[1] See 1 Corinthians iii. 18.

will be able to redeem his pledge, or to realize the expectations which he has so confidently held out. Nevertheless, I can but make the experiment. I shall, at least, forever rid myself of whatever doubts I may have entertained respecting the origin of the Bible. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." "He shall give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." "Then ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search after me with your whole heart."[1] Can words speak plainer? Well, I will ask—I will seek! If what I ask is given me—if I find what I seek—what can I want more to convince me that the Bible is the word of God? If what I ask is *not* given—if I do *not* find what I seek—I may safely conclude that the Bible is a very awkwardly-contrived lie; and, as such, I will cast it from me with contempt. Be this, however, as it may, I can lose nothing by making the trial; possibly I may gain much. Whether He who made this promise be God or man, his reasoning is full of judgment and good sense. For who *is* to give us the knowledge of God, if God himself either cannot or will not give it to us? Since "the father will not give his son a stone, when he asks bread"—since *evil men* "know how to give good gifts to their children;" how reasonable is the inference, that *the good God* must "know how to give good gifts unto his offspring"! I will apply to my unknown, my heavenly Father. I will ask him to give me the knowledge of himself. Will he mock me with a

[1] Luke xi. 9–13; Jeremiah xxix. 13.

delusion? Will he present me with "a scorpion," when "I ask him for bread"? I will implore him to teach me to believe what is *right* concerning him. Supposing the Bible account of him to be *wrong*, will he thrust this *wrong* belief upon me when I am asking him for a *right* one? Is he indeed so unlike a parent? It was he that fashioned a father's heart and implanted a father's feelings. Is it too much to suppose that he himself has the heart, the feelings, of a father?

The sense of my guilt held me back for a time. I feared that the great Being, whom I was about to address, would not listen to the prayer of one so worthless; but I reflected that a state of submission and desire could not be so displeasing to him as one of carelessness and rebellion. To lay myself low at his feet with the deepest prostration, and to implore mercy, was all that I *could* do in my present ignorance; and since mine was no longer a wilful ignorance, I hoped that Infinite Benevolence might in time extricate me from it.

One thing was sufficiently clear—man was not able to help me to what I wanted. God alone was able to assist me. It remained for me to try whether he were *willing* to save a soul that was perishing for "lack of knowledge."

Impelled by these reflections, fearful and uncertain, but with uncontrollable, unutterable longings, I directed my supplications to the "*unknown God*." O my Redeemer! the first breathings of my soul were not uttered in thy name. I rushed into the

presence of my Judge without a Mediator; but, doubtless, even then thy comeliness was thrown over the deformity of my soul, and the eye of my Father beheld me with pity for thy dear sake! My prayer ascended up to heaven fragrant with the incense of thy merits—though the poor wretch who offered it thought to please God by leaving thee out of it! Let thy goodness and mercy to me encourage other poor ignorant souls, who are groping their way to God in the dark, not to desist from the search till they have found him; and having found him, they will find thee; and having found thee, they will hold thee fast, or rather thou wilt hold them fast, to all eternity!

Thus I set my face in good earnest to seek the Lord my God. Every other employment was not only laid aside, but forgotten. I confessed to him that I was unworthy of the least of his favours which he had heaped upon me: yet I ventured to tell him that all these were of no value in my eyes, except as they encouraged me to hope for some further manifestation of his goodness. O God! (I dare not say, *my* God—the word died upon my unhallowed lips)—thou hast given me a wondrous power of knowing; but there is but one thing worth knowing; and of that I am ignorant—I would know thee. My capacity of knowledge is no better than a curse to me while the only thing worthy to satisfy that capacity is hid from me. Thou—thou art the true object of knowledge! O let me know thee—or let me know nothing! Thou hast given me a power

of loving; but in vain I look round for something to love. Thou canst fill my heart—and none but thou. But thee I cannot find; and there is some wretched principle within me which will not let me love thee. O thou, who art all lovely, restore me to the natural perception of a creature! Bring back my alienated affections to their true centre—that I may see and love Him who gave me birth. Thou hast made me capable of boundless longings and desires—but the whole earth would not satisfy those longings; no, nor the whole universe, unless I could find thee in it. Oh! why didst thou put within me such high and restless aspirings, if I was indeed made for so low an end as to live and die without knowing thee? Thou gavest me the appetite of hunger—and lo! ever since I was born, thou hast supplied me with food to satisfy that hunger. Dost thou care for the wants of the body, and wilt thou not provide for the wants of the soul? Now my *soul* hungers, which it would never have done hadst not thou formed it capable of spiritual appetites. Wilt not thou give the food that must satisfy my *soul?* Will the God, whose goodness prevents every *bodily* want, leave me to perish in my *spiritual* necessities? The power of thought, the ardent and ineffable breathings of my mind, are but so many aggravations of my misery. The very light of reason only serves to make my darkness visible, to discover to me how low I am fallen! These thy great, thy peculiar blessings, are just so many curses to me, so long as I am shut out from thy knowledge and love.

I know that I am not worthy; but *nature whispers to me that thou art merciful.* I see no way of becoming reconciled to thee; but reason teaches me that thou mayest be able to find out a way, though I cannot. Life is not life, unless I know the Giver of it. All the time that I have lived without thee in the world, I seem to have been dead; more senseless than a stock or stone—more brutish than the beasts which perish!

Such things as these I groaned out of the fulness of my heart; for I was seldom able to speak. My deep self-abhorrence, and the inexpressible ardency of my desires, choked up the way to every outward expression of my feelings. I often lay prostrate on the ground for hours together—not from any superstitious preference of that attitude, but because the sense of my own unfitness to come into God's presence quite overwhelmed me. I should have sunk *into* the earth, had that been possible; so great was the prostration of soul occasioned by the perpetual consciousness that God was present, and that I was unworthy.

In this manner I gave myself wholly up to seeking for my Creator. For days and weeks I, however, sought him apparently in vain. My blindness and uncertainty seemed to increase daily. I was often on the point of abandoning, in despair, an effort so unpromising, and wished for death, as the only thing which could terminate my afflicting suspense; but then it occurred to me that the Bible has nowhere promised an *immediate* answer to prayer.

The experiment, therefore, was not a fair one—unless it was persevered in: nay, I recollected that, so far from promising an *immediate* answer, it gives repeated intimations that we may perhaps have to wait a long time for the accomplishment of our desires. It warns men that they must "tarry the Lord's leisure"—that "they must pray, and not faint:"[1] besides this, I could not deny that God had long waited patiently for me, and borne with my careless unconcern. It was reasonable that I, in my turn, should wait patiently for God; and not abandon the search, when perhaps a little further perseverance would end in the realization of my most sanguine wishes. I knew, too, that I was in pursuit of an object worthy of the intenseness of my desires; and which, when found, would amply recompense any labour I might expend in seeking it. I therefore continued my entreaties, that God would graciously vouchsafe to open my understanding to know him, and my heart to love him as a rational creature ought to do.

I waited not in vain. God at length revealed himself to my understanding in a way that abundantly surpassed my expectations—I say to my *understanding;* for this was no rapturous trance of enthusiasm, but the sober and rational conviction of every faculty of my mind. I hope none of my readers will think that I attribute too much power, or too much benevolence, to the Supreme Being, when I assert that He who first gave me understanding,

[1] Psalm xxvii. 14; Luke xviii. 1.

did enlighten that understanding in a manner which I was sensible no efforts of my own could have done; and which yet was so clear—so consistent—so satisfactory, that every former act of my reason, in comparison with this, seemed like the incoherent ravings of delirium! If, however, they doubt, let them try the experiment for themselves: nor let them suppose that this was a sudden flash of conviction—no, it was a process as collected and deliberate as that by which the mind first scrutinizes and then embraces the propositions of mathematical science. My eyes were opened to discern the glory and excellence of the Scriptures, and their amazing superiority to every human composition. I perceived that they carried within their own pages a witness to their Divine origin. Convinced by this internal evidence, I recognized in the Bible the revelation of God to his fallen creatures. In this book alone, I saw perfect justice and perfect mercy—perfect holiness and perfect clemency—reconciled in a way worthy of the Deity; and though I know that this internal evidence cannot be perceived but by those whose eyes God himself opens to behold the wondrous things out of his law; yet, trusting that he will, in some instances, thus "confirm the word of his servant," I will endeavour. to comprise, in as short a space as possible, the points which struck me as most worthy of observation during this (to me) memorable perusal of the Sacred Oracles. Again I remind my readers that the correctness of my assertions can only be proved by bringing them to the touchstone

of Truth. If God did indeed teach me, he must be also willing to instruct them. Let them try whether he is able to keep this promise: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!"[1]

1. The character given of God in the Scriptures appeared to me such that no finite mind could have conceived or portrayed it. Here is nothing of the imperfection—the inconsistency—the littleness of humanity. All is majesty and infinity! No one attribute obscures or encroaches upon another. Here, and here only, we have a God glorious in holiness—inflexible in justice—that will not look upon iniquity: and yet slow to anger, and of tender mercy, justifying the ungodly, and teaching sinners in the way. Well and truly did the apostle describe the scope of the gospel in these terms: "And this is the message we have heard of God, and declare unto you, that *God is light; and in him is no darkness at all.*"[2] No—there is no darkness in the Scripture representation of God; but when *men* attempt to form conceptions of his character, for want of the comprehensive vision which so mighty a subject requires, they cannot look at one of his attributes without losing sight of another. Thus they can form some faint idea of his justice, or of his mercy, separately; though even that is a justice, and a mercy, limited and defective like their own. But their narrow minds cannot grasp the United Idea! They form some rude conjectures of the separate parts;

[1] Jer. xxxiii. 3. [2] 1 John i. 5.

but the mighty, consistent whole is quite beyond their largest thought. Therefore it is that some fancy to themselves a God who is all justice and no mercy; while far the greater part imagine him to be all mercy and no justice, or at least fondly persuade themselves that he will put his justice by, whenever it happens to interfere with their convenience. God *is* merciful, deluded man! but his mercy is not like thy mercy—it is neither a weak nor an unholy principle; nor will it avail thee aught, if thou diest in thy sins!

Thus man cannot describe one of God's perfections without marring another; but the Scripture takes them all into the account. His justice—his mercy—his holiness—his compassion, all meet in perfect unison, and their jarring claims are sweetly reconciled, in Christ Jesus. This was exactly what I wanted, but had scarcely hoped to find. This was the God whom I had longed to call "my God!" Now I could say, "*my* God!" Now I could call him "Father, and Friend!" Now I had forgiveness extended to me, which, far from involving the horrible compromise of God's holiness which I had fancied necessary before he could pardon me, was itself "the beauty of holiness:"—was such a manifestation of God's sanctity and his hatred to sin, that in the very act of showing mercy his justice and his holiness were most gloriously vindicated.

2. The character of Jesus caused me fresh transports of admiration every time I contemplated it. How many writers have wearied themselves in the

attempt to describe a perfect character! and how miserably have they all failed! Now, here was an undertaking ten thousand times more arduous: so bold that the very conception of it could scarcely have entered into the limited capacity of man. It was no less than this—to delineate the character of One who should be at once "perfect man and perfect God"—"God manifest in the flesh."

And how do they attempt to embody this magnificent conception? What splendid description shall convey to us the boundless ideas, or astound us into a belief of its reality? What learned definitions shall mark the points of the character they have chosen to portray? Do they seek to dazzle us by placing their hero in an exalted rank and surrounding him with every circumstance of magnificence? Do they make him run a long career of glory, adorned with the highest advantages of honour, valour, and learning? Quite the contrary. They give us the very plain and simple history of a man who passed his life in a poor and mean condition, surrounded by enemies who spared no pains to crush and disgrace him, who would have been overjoyed to discern the least defect in his extraordinary character. He is born in a manger; educated as a carpenter's son; lives in poverty and contempt as an itinerant preacher; and dies an infamous death between two thieves. The ignominy of his life and death, the low esteem in which he should be held by all, were portrayed beforehand with so much exactness in the sacred books of the Jews (books confided to the care of the

Jewish priests, his bitter enemies) that many infidels have been converted to Christianity by comparing the prophetic writings with the gospel history; and the Jewish Rabbins, unable to evade their force, have been constrained to prohibit the reading of one chapter in particular (Isaiah liii.) under the severest denunciations. The coincidence between the prophetic life and character of Jesus, and his real life and character, struck me forcibly. These were not prophecies of which it could be pleaded, that they were written after the events they described; for not only have we certain proof to the contrary, but we know that the Jews would be very glad of such a plea, and yet they have never ventured to make it. Nor can it be said that the accomplishment was forced and strained to suit the prophecy; for the most striking points of coincidence consist of facts over which an impostor could exercise no control, or traits of character which were very unlikely to have occurred to him. Again, supposing the gospel to be an invention, here was another difficulty of no common magnitude which its authors had to encounter. Not only had they to describe this perfect twofold character, but to make it naturally fall in and accord with divers accounts scattered here and there through a series of books written at very different times and in very different styles of description. Surely, if the gospel be a lie, it is the most ingenious lie that ever was invented, and its writers must have had longer and clearer heads than fall to the lot of impostors in our times.

But to return. I scrutinized again and again every part of this divine character, represented with so much plainness and under such unfavourable circumstances. But, after all my scrutiny, I could not find, I will not say a fault, but not even so much as an inconsistency, in the character of Jesus. To describe a character without any glaring defects, is a comparatively easy task; but to describe one which should be consistent in all its parts, appeared to me utterly impossible to a being so inconsistent as man. Especially a character so singular as this, whose distinguishing points are directly contrary to the distinguishing points of man's character in general. Like the Pharisees (though I trust in a far different spirit), I lay in wait to "catch Jesus in his words."[1] Often did I fancy that I had met with something at which I might reasonably be offended. But that Holy Spirit, who had already begun to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto me, always led me in the end to perceive that the offence was occasioned by my own gross ignorance and vitiated judgment of spiritual things. As each difficulty was successively cleared up, my admiration rose to ecstasy, and my doubts were lost in a deep and loving confidence, till at length, after many of these trials, I could, when any thing seemed strange to me, go to Jesus himself, and sitting down at his feet as a little child, expect from him a solution of the mystery. I no longer exclaimed, This is contrary to *reason*, I will not *believe:*—but, This surpasses my *comprehen-*

[1] Mark xii. 13.

sion, I cannot *understand;*—Lord, teach thy foolish and ignorant creature what this means! The more I studied this divine character, the more I grew up, as it were, into its holiness and simplicity, the more my understanding was enabled to shake off those slavish and sinful prejudices, which had hindered me from appreciating its excellence. Truly his "words were dearer to me than my necessary food."[1] He became unto me "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."[2] He was my "all in all." I did not want to have any knowledge, goodness, or strength, independently of him. I had rather be "accepted in the beloved" than received (had that been possible) upon the score of my own merits. I had rather walk leaning on his arm, than have a stock of strength given me to perform the journey alone. To learn, as a fool, of Christ, this was better to me than to have the knowledge of an angel to find out things for myself. Nor is there any thing in all this contrary to reason. For as the highest wisdom of a little child is to learn implicitly of its teacher, so I, having found a teacher and guide, whose intelligence was above mine or the angels', not as a man is above the child, but "as he who maketh a house is greater than the house," it was my business to learn implicitly of him, and to submit my mind to his, secure that I should thus attain the highest end of a created being.

But I turn back for a moment to the reflections which possessed me, when first the beauty, consist-

[1] Job xxiii. 12. [2] 1 Corinthians i. 30.

ency, and majesty of the character of Jesus began to be evident to my mind. I asked myself, who had invented this character? A company of ignorant fishermen? Or supposing we will not allow them to be the authors, still the language and style of the writings may prove to us that they were the composition of unlearned men, incapable of any effort of intellect beyond that required to tell a plain unvarnished tale. But grant even that they were men of learning and genius: still it appeared to me that to believe the life and character of Jesus to be the invention of any merely human intellect, required a far greater stretch of credulity than to believe that he was "God manifest in the flesh." Those indeed who can persuade themselves that this world and all its curiously contrived machinery were the work of a blind chance, may conclude that the character of Jesus was traced by a mere mortal pen. But those who attribute any thing to a divine power, must, we should think, perceive, in this, manifest tokens of a divine power. No intellect short of an infinite intellect could have conceived the mighty thought. No pen uninspired by that intellect could have embodied that thought in the life of an obscure individual. Were I to assure you that the immortal work of Newton was composed by a child at the breast, you would smile at my simplicity. But I am ready to weep at the violence you offer to your reasoning faculties, when you can lay your hand upon the life of Christ, and pronounce that to be the production of any human mind. Yet remembering

that your reason is blinded by the deceitfulness of sin, and that I was once as blind as yourself, not even this excess of prejudice can damp my hopes respecting you. I lift up my heart to God, who opens the blind eyes. In the mean time, though now you "see no beauty in Jesus that you should desire him," yet I beseech you, for the sake of truth and candour, to give his character in the Bible your serious consideration. There is a divine power and excellency in it, which may find its way to your heart when you least expect it. And if ever "God shines in your heart, to give you the knowledge of the glory of God," that glory will be revealed to you "in the face of Jesus Christ."[1]

3. The Scripture character of man struck me as differing exceedingly from that given in any other book. It was evidently no portrait of his own painting. Every other book represents man more or less as he ought to be. The Bible alone depicts him as he really is. All the systems of all the philosophers, all the religions of all nations, are founded upon the supposition that the heart of man is not altogether corrupt, that a little mending and patching only are wanting to bring it to perfection. One lauds the dignity and rectitude of human nature. Another talks of the sincerity of our endeavours, and the efficacy of our resolutions. What say the Scriptures? "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."[2] If you patch new cloth upon the old garment, you will only make

[1] See 2 Corinthians iv. 6. [2] Jeremiah xvii. 9.

the rent worse.[1] Of our dignity they say, "the crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned."[2] Of our rectitude and sincerity,—"ye are estranged from the womb; ye go astray as soon as ye are born, speaking lies."[3] Of our endeavours,—"without me, ye can do nothing."[4] Of our resolutions,—"ye are not sufficient of yourselves to think any thing as of yourselves."[5] They stoop not to flatter the pride and vanity of man by false and hollow encouragements. They go to the root of the evil. They tell him the plain truth; that he has neither rectitude to choose, nor sincerity to love, nor energy to resolve, nor strength to execute, that which is good. "They are sottish children, and have not known me; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge."[6] What I had been led to discover of my own heart, corresponded with the declarations of Scripture, as exactly as when "a man beholdeth his natural face in a glass." I will say more. This book discovered to me so many new enormities of which I was before ignorant, that I could not help exclaiming at every page, Surely He only who searcheth the heart could so accurately describe its dark and intricate movements! Surely none but he who made man could know so well what was in man!

Now, in any case of bodily disease, it inconceivably enhances our confidence in a physician if, while he describes to us the symptoms of our case,

[1] See Matt. ix. 16. [2] Lam. v. 16. [3] Psalm lviii. 3.
[4] John xv. 5. [5] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [6] Jer. iv. 22.

we perceive that our feelings exactly tally with every part of his description: we indulge a reasonable hope that he, who has so thoroughly acquainted himself with the symptoms of our complaint, will be able to suggest a remedy. Thus it was with my spiritual malady. I found every particular of my sufferings, my necessities, my blindness, obduracy, and depravity of heart, laid down in the Bible with such extraordinary and felicitous precision of language, that from that time *my own words* seemed quite inadequate to the description of my case. I could recollect none but *Scripture* words when I wanted to define my feelings: all other words seemed poor, feeble, and unmeaning. As a person who has long been labouring under sensations which he is unable to describe, if he lights upon an exact delineation of them, will exclaim, "Ah! that is exactly what I wanted to say; only I could not find words to express it in"—so in reading the Scripture description of the sin and ignorance of man, I was continually forced to cry out, "Yes—my experience is the very counterpart of this! only it is expressed with a force and appropriateness which no language of mine could have reached." It will not appear wonderful that, lighting upon this astonishing accurate definition of my wants and distresses, I should be disposed to give a very serious and attentive consideration to the remedy proposed for them.

4. I was greatly struck by the Scripture account of the nature or essence of sin. Other codes and systems content themselves with reprobating a few

of its exterior indications; the Bible goes straight to the heart, and drags its hidden motives to the light: other systems make the essence of sin to consist in the violation of our duties to man; the Bible makes it consist in the violation of our duty to God. These speak of the neglect of human or natural laws and rights; the Bible allows of no law but the law of God—no right but the right which God has in us as his creatures. It tells us that all sin is comprised in our alienation from Him in whom all subordinate duties and relations centre. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." This is the first and great commandment. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is the *second;* like unto the first, dependent on it, naturally and necessarily flowing from it.[1] To violate the first and great command, this is sin. To violate the second is the inevitable consequence of breaking the first; for no one ever yet hated his brother, who did not first hate God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God."[2] This is the deadly root whence every lesser abomination proceeds. All that human ingenuity has ever effected has been to lop off some of the minor branches, to prune a few excrescences, which have immediately sprouted forth with redoubled vigour. The Bible lays the axe to the root of the tree. The catalogue of our crimes always begins with this damning article, and is usually summed up in it—"In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God:"[3] this is the sum

[1] Matt. xxii. 37–39. [2] Rom. viii. 7. [3] Isaiah lix. 13.

and substance of our offence. This separates between us and God: this has brought the curse into every one of our dwellings. Other sins are but the puny offspring of this horrid and unnatural progenitor.

The Bible statement is the only one in the least consonant with unbiassed reason and sound sense. For, if there be a God at all, he must have a greater right in his creatures than any other being can possibly have. To serve and love him supremely must be that law which alone deserves to be called the law of nature; and if men universally love and delight in any thing else more than in him, they stand universally condemned of living in a state of contrariety to the law of nature: that is, they frustrate the true end of their nature; they are guilty of that black and unnatural dereliction from duty, which constitutes the essence and malignity of sin.

5. The Scripture remedy for sin, and all the evils it has brought in its train, was so consummately adapted to my necessities, that this circumstance would have alone sufficed to rivet my attention. Sensible that I was in a state of alienation from God, I was afraid of his just vengeance, and yet more afraid that in pardoning sin he should prove a weak and unjust being like myself. If I rejected the idea of an angry God, an unholy God seemed my only alternative. I saw not how infinite compassion itself could save me, but at the expense of infinite justice and purity. Those only who have known the agony of feeling themselves condemned by God and their own conscience, can comprehend

the joy with which I hailed the glad tidings, "that God can be just, and yet the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."[1] My wretched and unnatural state with regard to God consisted in three particulars. I was ignorant of God—averse from God—and afraid of God. Jesus Christ revealed the Father to me—took away the enmity—and opened a way of access with boldness and confidence. I understood how "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."[2] O the depth, the wisdom, the harmony, of my Father's counsels, as "the Spirit took of them" for Christ's sake, "and showed them unto me"! O the exceeding glory and excellence of my Father's character, as I studied it in Him "who is the brightness of the Father's image, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"![3] Then I perceived how the doctrine of "the cross, while to some it is a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness, is nevertheless to those who are saved, the power of God and the wisdom of God."[4] In the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I beheld the love of God manifested, his law exalted, his justice satisfied, and my salvation complete. I knew by my own joyful experience "that God has given unto us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son."[5]

Poor infidel, whoever thou art, my brother or sister in sin and misfortune! cast not these pages from thee as the ravings of enthusiasm. Scoff at

[1] Rom. iii. 25, 26. [2] 2 Cor. v. 19. [3] Heb. i. 3; Col. ii. 9.
[4] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. [5] 1 John v. 11.

them I know thou wilt, unless the Spirit of God arrest thy heart as he did mine. But remember that they are written by one who once held the same sentiments with thyself. Consider that so wonderful a revolution in these sentiments could not have been effected and persisted in without some reasons for such a change. I have told thee how I came to the knowledge of what I believe to be the truth. The experiment I made use of was simple and easy, and, in my case, conclusive. Would it not be more candid on thy part to try the same test, than to scoff at what thou hast not tried? All I ask is, that when any thing I say appears mystical or extravagant, thou wouldst try for thyself, whether a persevering use of "the Test of Truth" may not make it appear plain and reasonable.

The grand difference which I found between the remedy offered by the Bible, and that of every other religion in the world, was this. They all hold out to us insufficient motives for action, and direct us to an insufficient source of strength. The motive of our virtue is to be self-esteem or the applause of others. Our strength is to be derived from our own resolutions or reasonings. The Bible, on the contrary, forbids us to think highly of ourselves, or to "receive honour one of another:" it commands us to "seek the honour which cometh of God only."[1] The love of our reconciled God in Christ Jesus, sweetly rekindling our long-extinguished affections to him, is to be the motive of all our actions. Now,

[1] Rom. xii. 3, 10; Phil. ii. 3; John v. 44.

this motive will last as long as the love of God lasts; that is, to all eternity. Human motives are perishable. The praise we so eagerly covet, disappoints our expectation when it is obtained. And what self-esteem can quiet a wounded conscience? Besides, the Bible motive is worthy of a rational being. Human motives are such, that those who are most influenced by them are ashamed to own them. Love, divine love, purifies, and ennobles, and satisfies the soul: it makes the source of actions pure, and then the actions themselves must be so. Human motives debase the soul, and render it mean and selfish: they must in the end prove unsatisfactory: they pollute the source of actions, and make men like painted sepulchres, fair without, but hollow and rotten within. And as for strength, while the Bible assures us that all human efforts and resolutions are frail as the bruised reed and transitory as the morning dew, it informs us that "the grace of Jesus is sufficient for us," and that we "can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us."[1] I applied for this grace and this strength. I did not apply in vain.

One peculiarity in the Scripture remedy struck me as very remarkable. This was the pains taken to pour contempt upon all human pride and glory. As we fell by pride and independence, we must be restored by humility and dependence. The Scriptures leave us not one single thing in ourselves whereof to glory. The "wise man must not glory

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9; Phil. iv. 13.

in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his might, nor the rich man in his riches."[1] All boasting is forever excluded. If we come to God, it must be as sinners through Christ. If we receive heaven, it must be as the purchase of Christ's merits, not of our own deservings. From first to last, the Christian is taught to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but *unto thy name* give glory."[2]

6. During this reading, I discovered the reason which had so long prevented me from receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, and from finding in the Scriptures those treasures of wisdom and gladness which they contain. "They that be whole," says this divine philosophy, "need not a physician, but they that are sick."[3] So long as I knew not that my soul was altogether infected with the dreadful malady of sin, it was not possible for me to appreciate His love, who came to save me from my sins. But when the Holy Spirit taught me that I was utterly undone and unclean, then the knowledge of Him who "is able to save to the uttermost," and whose "blood cleanseth from all sin," became the only cordial which could relieve my fainting spirits. From that moment I ceased to stumble at the doctrine of the cross. I was a sinner, I wanted a Saviour. In Jesus Christ I found all my wants satisfied. I fled for refuge to this hope, which had been thus unexpectedly set before me. Into his hands I have committed my spirit, and I know "that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him."[4] Thus will you,

[1] Jer. ix. 23. [2] Psalm cxv. 1. [3] Matt. ix. 12. [4] 2 Tim. i. 12.

when God shows you that you are vile and condemned and hateful in his sight, experience the sweetness of the name of Jesus.

7. The Scriptures afford me a clue to many things which have embarrassed the most penetrating understandings. One of these things was the reason why it happens that this book appears full of absurdities and contradictions to an unconverted person; while the believer views it as a glorious whole, all whose parts are in perfect unison and explain and illustrate each other. And this is the reason:— "The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "For the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them."[1] The doctrines of Scripture, which had before appeared to me an inexplicable mass of confusion and contradictions, were now written on my understanding with the clearness of a sunbeam. For, saith the same Scripture, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[2]

Above all, that once abhorred doctrine of the divinity of Christ was now become exceeding precious to me. From my inmost soul I recognized Jesus as my Lord and my God. Of this change in my views, I also found an account in Scripture.

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 14; 2 Cor. iv. 4. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 6.

"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."[1] Nominal Christians may indeed call him Lord, Lord, with their lips, and in the externals of a formal devotion, but their hearts cannot go along with their professions, until the Spirit of God convince them.

I was sensible that a vast revolution had been effected in my temper, views, and dispositions. For this I should have been at a loss to account, had not the same Bible furnished me with a solution of the mystery. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; *old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*"[2]

The external evidences of Christianity, though I now perceived all their force, were no longer necessary to my conviction. I need no proofs to convince me that the sun is shining at mid-day. I needed none to convince me that the love of my reconciled God and Father was shining full upon my soul, with an enlightening, purifying, and vivifying influence. When objections assailed me, I found myself much in the situation of the man who opposed to all the cavils of the Jews this simple yet irresistible answer:— "Whether these things be as ye say, I know not;— *one thing I know,—that whereas I was blind, now I see.*"[3]

Having formed my opinions solely by the word of God, my attention was naturally attracted by the various sects of Christianity with which this land of toleration abounds. I belonged to the Established

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 3. [2] 2 Cor. v. 17. [3] John x. 25.

Church, and found every reason to continue within her walls. But in every sect which took the pure unadulterated Bible for its standard, I perceived a small number of persons who desired no other happiness than the love of God. These, I observed, to whatever denomination they belong, loved and understood one another, but were often hated and misconstrued by the rest of mankind. If they differed as to some points of minor importance, they were, however, unanimous upon the grand essentials of religion. In this one point especially, I found them to be all perfectly agreed among themselves, and perfectly opposed to all other men:—they with one consent ascribed to Jesus the whole glory of their salvation, acknowledging no merit in themselves which could possibly interest God in their favour.

At the same time, I could not help perceiving that in every persuasion (my own not excepted) the *majority* were Christians only in name, and in reality believed in God no more than the professed free-thinker believes in him. For this one thing is certain. If they did really believe in the Bible, they would be more intent upon escaping the threatenings and gaining the promises of the Bible, than they are upon the riches, honour, pleasures, or learning of this world. But the contrary is the fact. They are more intent upon the riches, honour, pleasures, or learning of this world, than upon escaping the threatenings, or gaining the promises, of the Bible. Therefore, they do not believe the threatenings or promises of the Bible. If they believed

them, they would act upon them. By not acting upon them, they prove that they do not believe them. To believe really in God, is to be convinced that he is something better than the world, and better than self. It implies therefore a hearty and entire renunciation of the world and self; and a hearty and entire devotion of ourselves to God, as to something incomparably better.

In the *few* then of every denomination, I recognized the true Church of Christ. At first the small number of real Christians perplexed me, and I anxiously exclaimed, Are there so few that be saved? But I remembered that even this circumstance added its testimony to the veracity of the Scripture statement, which always represents the Church of Christ as a little flock,[1] exposed to the hatred and derision of the larger portion of mankind, who should continue obstinate in their monstrous rebellion against the Most High. Besides this, when I reflected on the mightiness of the change which must take place in every sinner's heart before he could sincerely love God, and the necessity of his submitting to be viewed with contempt and disgust by many who before had loved and courted him, I rather marvelled at the miracle of divine grace, by which *any* are saved, than inquired, why so few? But I found from the prophetic writings that the number of Christ's enemies shall not always exceed that of his friends. The time is not far distant when "the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."[2]

[1] Luke xii. 32. [2] Isaiah xi. 9.

I have endeavoured briefly to recapitulate the chief reflections which occurred to me while I was reading the Bible, with the help (as I verily believe) of the Spirit of Jesus. From that time I have continued to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to hear his word; taking him for my Teacher and Guide in things temporal as well as spiritual. He has found in me a disciple so slow of comprehension, so prone to forget his lessons and to act in opposition to his commands, that were he not infinitely meek and lowly in heart, he would long ago have cast me off in anger. But he still continues to bear with me, and to give me line upon line, and precept upon precept. And I am certain that he will never leave me nor forsake me; for though I am variable and inconstant, "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."[1]

In narrating the means by which I was drawn forth out of the horrible abyss of infidelity, my design has been to give some idea of the process, which must take place in every sinner's heart, before he can know, or desire to know, the God who gave him being. And thus it must be with you. You must be roused to a lively sense of the importance of knowing God;—must be convinced that you have hitherto lived in a state of blindness and enmity against him:—you must learn that all your fancied wisdom is mere folly in his sight; and must be ready to receive the truth as God is pleased to reveal it. Instead of insolently dictating the way

[1] James i. 17.

in which God shall deal with his offending creature, you must lay down the arms of your rebellion, and accept of pardon and peace *upon his terms*. When these dispositions are wrought in your heart (and they can be wrought only by a Divine Power), then the Lord will reveal himself to you, show you the truth of his Everlasting Gospel, and bring the salvation of Jesus home to your heart. I ask you not to believe any thing upon my word. That were indeed foolish, when you cannot take it upon God's word. But I beseech you to make *trial* of God's word. Reject it not till you have put it to the test I have proposed to you. Examine thus for yourselves. Know whether the God of Scripture be, as he is there styled, "the God who heareth prayer." And we, "who have tasted that the Lord is gracious," will not cease to pray for you, that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His Mighty Power." Amen.—Eph. i. 17–19.

THE FREENESS OF GRACE

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CHAPTER I.

ON ORIGINAL SIN.

An obscure or imperfect view of one doctrine often leads to the rejection of another. Thus I have always found, that those who conscientiously reject the doctrine of election, do so from an inability to take into the account the absolutely free and unconditional nature of God's grace in pardoning sinners; and I believe the clearness of our views of this latter doctrine to be, in most cases, commensurate with our deep and abiding conviction of man's utter and original depravity.

This may happen to real Christians. A person may see enough of the sin of his heart and life, to come heartily to Christ for salvation, and yet he may not be so deeply convinced of his entire ruin in the fall, and of the desperate wickedness and utter helplessness of his nature from the very womb, as to perceive the justice, or even the necessity, of the doctrine of election.

Yet a very clear conviction of our natural enmity against God, and of our entire inability to seek or to choose any thing that is good, plainly involves with it a conviction that if we love God it must be because he *first* loved us; that if we choose Christ and his ways at all, it can be ascribed to no other cause than that he *first* chose us,—or, in other words, that we are elect, according to the foreknowledge of God.

Such being my view of the case, I entreat my reader's attention while I say a few words on the doctrine of original sin. It is the very first lesson in the school of Christ; and it is only by being well rooted and grounded in these first principles that we can hope to go on to perfection. The doctrine is written in Scripture as with a sunbeam. If we do not feel some conviction of it in our own hearts, it affords a sad proof that we still belong to that "generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness."[1] "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits."[2] With *him* a high look, and a proud heart, an idle word, and a light thought, is sin. His law is spiritual, reaching to every thought and intent of the heart. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."[3]

If then we say that we have *no* sin, we make God a liar; but if we allow that we *sin at all*, then must we allow that *our whole nature* is sinful and corrupt.

[1] Prov. xxx. 12. [2] Prov. xvi. 2. [3] James ii. 10.

At least our Saviour thought so. He declares that corrupt fruit only can come from a corrupt tree: corrupt doings, of a corrupt nature. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."[1] As if our blessed Saviour had said, "Be consistent; either say at once that ye know no sin, or if indeed conscience witnesses that ye do sin every day and every hour of your lives, then confess that your corrupt doings proceed from a nature inherently corrupt. If your nature were a good, a holy nature, it could not be thus continually putting forth the evil fruit of unholy actions. The clusters that bow down the branches of the vine may become less luxuriant, but still they are grapes; no change of season or of climate can cause it to teem with the unsightly fruit of the bramble, or the tasteless berries of the thorn. Look then no longer for any thing good in yourselves; it is to look for grapes on thorns, or figs on thistles. Once I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed; but now are ye turned to the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me. The parent stock became corrupt, and spread corruption through all its branches. One only hope remains for you. Confess your sin and misery, and seek to be grafted, contrary to nature, into me the true vine: thus abiding in me, and I in you, ye, who in yourselves can do nothing, shall in me bear much and good fruit." The fountain of humanity has been poisoned at its very head, and will bring forth nothing but

[1] Matt. vii. 18.

pollution: "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;"[1] out of it flow, as from their natural source, evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, and all that train of corruptions mentioned by our Lord in Mark vii. 21, 22. "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God."[2] These words of our Lord again seem to imply, "Be consistent; either admit that I am God, or if you will have it that I am but a mere man like yourself, then ascribe no goodness to me; for know that in man dwelleth no good thing." "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."[3] "That which is born of the flesh is flesh.[4] They that are in the flesh cannot please God."[5] Why so? Because "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."[6] O how the very opinions of men on this subject prove the depth of their blindness and perverseness! that they will persist in saying, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing:" when He who trieth the heart and reins has affirmed of them that they are "wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."[7]

The Scripture history of man opens with these words, "And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness. So God created man in

[1] Jer. xvii. 9. [2] Mark x. 17. [3] Luke xiii. 2, 3. [4] John iii. 6.
[5] Rom. viii. 8. [6] Rom. viii. 7. [7] Rev. iii. 17.

his own image; in the image of God created he him."[1] "God is a spirit;"[2] it must, therefore, have been in his spiritual image that man was created. In holiness, in happiness, in knowledge, such as become his state,—in these things man resembled his Maker.

Now, it is very remarkable that after the fall, we are expressly told, that "Adam begat a son in his own likeness after his image,"[3] that is, as unlike the original holy image of God as darkness is to light, or corruption to incorruption. For would we ascertain from the mouth of God himself, what man was then like, let us go a chapter or two further, and we shall find the Lord looking down upon his ruined creation, upon those things which his hand had made, and which he had once pronounced to be very good.

Now "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth;[4] and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."[5] Can the Spirit of truth testify of our character in plainer or in stronger terms?

But lest those who resist even the Spirit when his words would convince them of sin, should object that this description is only applied to the wicked generation that was swept away by the flood, God has provided against this subterfuge.

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[1] Gen. i. 25, 27. [2] John iv. 24. [3] Gen. v. 3.
[4] Gen. vi. 12. [5] Gen. vi. 5.

The windows of heaven are stopped; the rain from heaven is restrained; the waters return from off the earth; and the ark rests upon the mountains of Ararat. Eight chosen persons, the remains of the once countless multitude, come forth from this hiding-place of the Lord's providing, and join together in a sacrifice of thanksgiving which rises up as a sweet-smelling savour before God.[1] Let us pause a moment to see what we can collect from Scripture concerning the persons who knelt around the family altar. One of them is cited as a pattern of holiness throughout the Old and New Testaments. We learn but little of his three sons: yet an act of filial piety is recorded of two of them which, together with the blessing of their inspired father, mark them, in our esteem, for holy men. Nothing is told us concerning their wives: yet we may not unfairly suppose that out of this little female remnant there would be some who, like their husbands and father, walked with God. So that we have here eight persons, of whom we know that *three* were good, and we know only of *one* who was wicked. Now it was *upon this very occasion*, in which the sweet savour of this very sacrifice was ascending before God, that he said, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."[2] What, *still evil?* Still does the Holy Ghost bear his testimony against man? Yet not one of all that rebellious generation remains. Mankind is reduced to an exceeding small

[1] Gen. viii. 20, 21. [2] Gen. viii. 21.

compass. Never has the earth been so purified. Never since has it contained so select an assembly as that which we are now considering. Yet still—still the character of man is thus given *by Him who cannot lie.* "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth:"—the heart of the righteous Noah, no less than that of the ungodly Ham; for had there been an exception in so small a circle, the Judge of the whole earth would not have included them all in the same sweeping accusation. Moreover, he declares that the heart of man *will be always evil:* for that is the very reason he gives why he will curse the ground no more for man's sake. He does not say, "I will not do it again, because they will improve—their hearts will grow better;" but, "I will do so no more, *because the heart of man is evil from his youth.*" Not all the waters of the flood can wash out the guilty stain which Adam has entailed upon his children—not all the waters of the flood can cleanse the earth, so long as one of Adam's sin-defiled race shall remain upon its surface. And to this day, if we had no other witness to testify against us that our hearts are evil, yet have we an accusing monitor in the clouds, even the bow of the covenant which God has set there for a sign to us, that he will not in *our* days bring the waters to cover the earth; because the imaginations of the thoughts of *our* hearts are *evil—only* evil—evil *continually—evil from our youth.* The Hebrew word rendered imaginations is, as we learn from the marginal notes, much stronger than the interpretation conveys an idea of,

since it signifies the whole intents, purposes, and desires of the heart.

Would we know the *reason* of this indelible pollution, which fallen man has transmitted to his latest descendants? let that given by Scripture suffice:—"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."[1] But is not the new-born babe innocent? Yes, from the commission of actual sin, but not from the pollution of a nature altogether sinful; for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."[2] Why then is death so often commissioned to snatch away the babe in the first hour of its existence?—why, but because that babe is a sinful creature? Sin, that root of bitterness, has already shot its fibres into the inmost soul. That infant, "born of the flesh, is flesh,"[3] and "as such cannot please God"[4]—cannot bring forth any other than the accursed fruits of the flesh. As surely as the cockatrice' egg will hatch into a viper, so surely will the babe born of unclean parents be itself unclean, so surely it will be "by nature a child of wrath, even as others."[5] And therefore it is as the apostle tells us, that "Death reigneth over all, even over all them that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."[6] I entertain not a doubt that these little ones are redeemed by the blood of Jesus; but that they *need* redemption, that they are *sinners*,—children of wrath by nature,—

[1] Job xiv. 4. [2] Rom. v. 12. [3] John iii. 6.
[4] Rom. viii. 8. [5] Ephes. ii. 3. [6] Rom. v. 14.

of this truth I am equally well assured, and every little mound in the churchyard seems to have a voice that tells me so.

The baptism of infants is a striking recognition of their ruined and sinful state by nature; for what is baptism but a sign of the washing away of the filth of our polluted nature?

Let not any one so far misunderstand me as to suppose that I think baptism is any thing more than the *outward sign* of regeneration, or the washing away of the filth of the flesh: though I believe that if we carry little children *in faith* to Jesus, we have every reason to hope that he will receive them in his arms and bless them with the inward grace. But my object here is solely to point out how in the baptism of infants is acknowledged the doctrine of original sin.

The Holy Ghost has instructed the apostle to give us such a full comment upon the spiritual death we all die in Adam, that we cannot too often read and pray over the following passages, Rom. v. 12, 21; 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22, 45, 49; Ephes. iv. 22, 24; Col. iii. 9, 10; there are many others in which our nature in Adam is spoken of, in contradistinction to the new and holy nature we receive in Christ Jesus.

The Scripture is so full of testimonies to this important truth, that it seems to mingle with every other doctrine, and serves as a kind of master-key to unlock every other mystery. Take away this, and the Redeemer loses half his praise; the types and sacrifices of the law lose half their significancy; for they shadow forth the sin of our nature, as well

as our actual transgressions, and Jesus came to deliver us from the guilt of our nature as well as from the evil of our lives. Oh, what an unmeaning heap of words has been handed down to us in the law of Moses, the Psalms of David, the confessions of Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Daniel, Jeremiah, and the rest of God's saints, if that evil nature which caused them to groan did not really exist! Above all, what shall we make of Romans iii. and vii.? What shall we understand by the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, between the old man and the new man, between the carnal and spiritual affections? Was St. Paul dreaming when he said, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing"?[1] Was he beside himself when he declared "that he found in himself a law, that when he would do good, evil was present with him"?[2] That though by divine grace he had learnt "to delight in the law of God after the inward man, yet still he saw another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members"?[3] The apostle of the Gentiles, "who laboured more abundantly than they all;"[4] he who "had been caught up to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful for him to utter"[5] amongst sinful men; he who "counted all things but dung, that he might win Christ;"[6] he who was "ready, not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord

[1] Rom. vii. 18. [2] Rom. vii. 21. [3] Rom. vii. 22, 23.
[4] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [5] 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4. [6] Phil. iii. 8.

Jesus;"[1] this chosen vessel of mercy, full of zeal and full of love, *and under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost*, so groaned under the burden of the original corruption of his nature, the law of sin warring in his members, that he was compelled to cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[2] And from the time of Paul there has never been a real Christian who has not often felt himself constrained to adopt his language, and to say, in the language of his soul, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The remedy, as is usual in Scripture, follows close upon the complaint: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."[3]

In this epistle, the Holy Ghost is seen peculiarly to fulfil his sacred office. He shall convince of sin, of righteousness, and of justification. How strong is the language in which he presses the first condemning testimony home to our shrinking conscious bosoms! How sweet and clear the second part of his testimony, when he takes of the righteousness of Jesus and shows it to us, yea, tells us that it is ours, if we will cease to go about to establish our own! And when he is fulfilling the third part of his mission, with what triumphant energy has he inspired the apostle to unfold to us how we are justified freely by his grace, acquitted so that none can lay aught to our charge, not Satan himself, that accuser of the brethren; for the prince of this world is judged, Satan bruised under our feet!

[1] Acts xxi. 13. [2] Rom. vii. 13. [3] Rom. vii. 25.

But to return to my subject: "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin, as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God, they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans iii. 9–17; which compare with Psalm liii. Now, since God the Spirit knew the hearts of his creatures, and has given this as a faithful portrait of the real character of every individual upon the face of the earth; it follows that *all* have that original sin, which is the fruitful source of all evil actions and dispositions.

We have now brought our testimony from the "three that bear witness in heaven,"—having heard from God the Father, that the imagination of man's heart is only evil from his youth;—from God the Son, that out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; that the corrupt heart, like a corrupt tree, can only bring forth corrupt fruit; —and from God the Spirit, that the carnal mind is enmity against God; that in us dwelleth no good thing.

Now, as to all those vain and curious questions which men, who would be wise above that which is

written, have raised on the nature and causes of original sin, and how it is conveyed from Adam to his fallen race—with all these I would have nothing to do. All I want to insist upon, is the doctrine *as it stands in every part of the Bible;* and as it is exemplified in the heart of every individual upon the face of the earth. In our own heart we cannot but find it, if we will let conscience do its office. Let, then, "every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."[1] Let us pray that the Spirit of truth would convince of what is written in the Word of Truth—that he would make "the burden of original sin grievous and intolerable" to us: for till we thus perceive the truth, so as really to groan under the weight of our corrupt nature, we shall not discover the necessity of that new and holy nature, without which we cannot enter the kingdom of God. "They that be whole need not a physician."[2] They that be righteous desire not a Saviour. They that acknowledge sin in part, but not that they are *wholly* depraved—estranged *from the womb,*—these, not conscious that the whole garment is spotted by the flesh, will seek to patch new cloth on the old garment, and so will but make the rent worse: they will seek to put the new wine into old bottles—and what wonder if the old bottles burst, and the wine run out, and the bottles perish? No—the whole man must be renewed; and such as feel not their need of this thorough renovation have not yet made the first step towards the possession of eternal life. For how

[1] Rom. iii. 19. [2] Matt. ix. 12.

can we be *alive to God* without knowing that we were once "dead in sins"?[1] How be restored to the Shepherd of our souls, without knowing that by nature we were as sheep going astray?[2] How become children of grace, and yet not know that we "were by nature children of wrath even as others"?[3] What should we think of the man, who was born blind, if, when he was restored to sight, he had professed to be ignorant that he was born blind? This cannot be: therefore as in nature, so in grace. Those who have been really converted from a state of nature, all join in their confessions of that state. I was blind; but now I see. I was dead; but now I am alive. I was lost; but now am found. Nor do they think they can too often revive their sense of God's goodness and their own misery, by thus looking back to "the rock from whence they were hewn—to the hole of the pit from which they were digged."[4] I conclude this subject in the words of one of the brightest luminaries of the Church—he has been called the judicious Hooker: had he lived in the present age a far different title would have been allotted to him; for he is, of all authors I ever read, the most full and decisive upon what are called *Calvinistic doctrines.* "It may seem something extreme which I will speak: therefore let every one judge it as his own heart shall tell him, and no otherwise. I will but only make a demand,—if God should yield unto us, not as he did unto Abraham, if fifty, forty, thirty: yea, or if ten good persons could be

[1] Ephes. ii. 1, 5. [2] Isaiah liii. 6. [3] Ephes. ii. 3. [4] Isaiah li. 1.

found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed: but and if he should make us an offer thus large—search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam; find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure without any stain or blemish at all; and for that one man's only action, neither man nor angel shall feel the torments prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men?"

CHAPTER II.

ON FREE GRACE.

The principal arguments drawn from Scripture against the absolute freeness of Divine grace in pardon, justification, and sanctification of sinners, are such as these: that the threats and promises of the gospel are usually expressed in a *conditional* form; and that grace is promised to all who *diligently seek* for it: this seeking then becomes a sort of meritorious act, by which we attract the notice or favour of God, and induce him to give us his grace. We will endeavour to examine each of these arguments separately.

And first, it must be allowed that there is a sense in which both the threats and promises of the gospel are conditional. As to the former of these, "the

soul that sinneth, it shall die:"[1] "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them:"[2] "whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."[3] These are some of the threats of that "God who is a consuming fire."[4] And surely we have abundantly fulfilled the conditions to which they are attached. Death—even the death of the soul—is our well-earned wages. The curse is our natural inheritance. We are born to it: for we are conceived in sin—we are shapen in iniquity—we go astray as soon as we are born, speaking lies; and every day, and every hour, and every moment, do we confirm our right and title to this inheritance; deserving, both by nature and practice, the fulfilment of every one of the heavy threats of that God who cannot lie. Now, I would ask, what efforts of our own can rescue us from the fulfilment of these threatenings, since we are debtors to do the *whole* law? and if we offend in *one* point, we are guilty of *all;* and cursed are we if we continue not in *all* things written in the book of the law to do them. We can but deserve them over and over. Oh, talk not of conditions—*these are the conditions! We have* done *our* part—have irretrievably ruined ourselves. We owe ten thousand talents, and *have nothing to pay!*

But *Christ* has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being *made a curse for us.* "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and

[1] Ezekiel xviii. 20. [2] Gal. iii. 10. [3] James ii. 10. [4] Deut. iv. 24.

by him all that believe are justified from all things."[1] He, and he only, has borne the threats of God in his people's stead; and he has borne them so completely away, that they shall never be mentioned to believers any more. Their sins have been transferred to Jesus. "He himself bare them in his own body on the tree."[2] Infinite justice has been appeased by an infinitely complete satisfaction,[3] and now (oh, let us lift up our hearts in gratitude unspeakable) "God can be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."[4] Thus, if we believe in Jesus, we escape the threatened curse of God, not because *we* have fulfilled one single condition, by which we *might* have escaped it, but simply and solely because *Jesus has borne the curse for us.* He has borne it *all,* and he has borne it *alone. His* almighty shoulders have sustained the entire weight of the curse, one tittle of which had been sufficient to *grind the whole human race to powder.* He has "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."[5] And now, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again,"[6] thus proving *that all is paid;* for having once as our surety taken upon himself our mighty debt, we may rest satisfied that justice did not let him go until he had paid *the uttermost farthing.*

[1] Acts xiii. 38, 39. [2] 1 Peter ii. 24.
[3] John i. 7; ii. 1, 2; Heb. ix. 14; x. 12–18.
[4] Rom. iii. 26. [5] Col. ii. 14. [6] Rom. viii. 33, 34.

Consider the cross of Christ; *who* it was that suffered:—"The mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."[1] *How* he suffered:—"behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."[2] Remember that Christ crucified is "the wisdom of God and the power of God;"[3] and then say, would this mighty plan have been devised to avert the curse from man, if he had been able by any efforts of his own to escape it? But there are those who willingly allow that Christ has done *a great deal* towards saving them from the wrath to come, but *not* that he has done *all*. It must be a kind of joint concern, in which he has engaged to pay a part, if we pay the rest. His salvation is regarded as a sort of reserve to make up deficiencies. True, he died for us, but then *we* must *merit* by repentance that his death be applied to us; we must do what *we* can to appease God's justice, and he will throw his blood into the scale to make up the rest.

I do sincerely believe that of all the delusions which Satan has succeeded in putting into the hearts of men, of all his subtle contrivances to rob Christ of his glory, this is the masterpiece. For of Satan's other devices we are less ignorant, but this one often comes to us dressed up in such a specious shape, as to "deceive, if possible, the very elect."[4] Many to whom the absurdity of purchasing heaven by their own good works is sufficiently evident; who see that pardon is bought with the precious blood of Christ; are yet capable of the still greater absurdity of

[1] Isaiah ix. 6. [2] Lam. i. 12. [3] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. [4] Matt. xxiv. 24.

thinking to *buy* that precious blood which is *above all price*, with the poor imperfect offer of a few sighs and tears which they call repentance. And what is this repentance? Alas! they have never repented at all, if they be not ready from the heart to acknowledge, with the excellent Bishop Beveridge, "I cannot so much as confess my sins, but my very confessions are an aggravation of them; my repentance needs to be repented of; my tears want washing; and the very washings of my tears need to be washed over again, in the blood of my Redeemer."

Then let us freely acknowledge that the heavy burden of God's wrath has been lifted away *only* by the atonement of Christ, and not by any superadded condition of our own performing. Christ has trodden the wine-press of God's wrath alone, and of the people there was none with him. And as to repentance, that is just as much the purchase of his blood, as heaven itself is.[1] "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but *in me* is thine help,"[2] is the language of Scripture to all who are looking round for some means of escape from the angry threatenings of God's word; some refuge to which they may flee from the wrath to come.

As to the promises, I do not say that they are unconditional, either, but I do say that the conditions on which they depend are such as guilty man is altogether incapable of performing. I do say that Jesus, as our *Surety*, has performed all these *for* us, and *by his Spirit* will perform them all, *in* us. Through his perfect atonement we escape the threat-

[1] Acts v. 31. [2] Hosea xiii. 9.

enings; through his unspotted obedience we become heirs of the promises,—heirs of eternal life. For if the blame of our sins has been imputed to *him*, then has the merit of his righteousness been imputed to *us*. "If he has been made sin for us, then have we been made the righteousness of God in him."[1] And because the promises are ours for his sake, therefore the conditions of them are worked in us by his free Spirit; "for it is not we who live the life of faith, but Christ that liveth in us."[2] I am very earnest on this point, because I believe that every thing we arrogate to ourselves in the work of redemption, is just so much taken from the finished work of Jesus. It is indeed very natural to our carnal minds to wish to have something of our own to look at, to rest upon, to glory in; but in proportion as we become spiritually-minded we shall discover that we have nothing of our own but sin and misery and helplessness; we shall learn to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." "By grace ye are saved through faith; and even that faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."[3] "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."[4] Oh, then, may we, receiving "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, reign in life by one, even Jesus Christ."[5]

One of the sweetest promises, upon which the

[1] 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. iv. 6; xi. 24; v. 19; Gal. iii. 29.
[2] Gal. ii. 20; John xv. 4, 5.
[3] Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[4] Rom. vi. 23.
[5] Rom. v. 17

mind of every Christian rests with unspeakable delight, runs thus: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."[6] Here is a *condition*, him that cometh; and a *promise*, I will not cast out. But who *are* those that come to Jesus? "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."[1] "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."[2] "No man can come to me, except it were given him of my Father."[3] How distinctly are we here told that the same free mercy which promises to receive us *when we come*, must be put forth to *make us come*, or *we never should come!* The promise will surely be fulfilled to all who obey the condition, but none *can* obey the condition save those *to whom it is given*. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."[4] Precious promise! indispensable condition! For how can such as delight not in holiness, abide in the love of the most holy Jesus? Yet I will freely confess, that if the performance of even this most just and reasonable condition depended in any measure on *myself*, I should think the Lord Jesus had most cruelly mocked me, in setting before me a promise which, in my case at least, must forever remain unfulfilled. But, blessings on his sacred name, he has not made the promise without providing for the condition; having also promised to put his laws in my mind and write them on my heart.[5] So that I look on these very *conditions* as so many *promises*. As

[1] John vi. 37. [2] John vi. 37. [3] John vi. 44.
[4] John vi. 65. [5] John xv. 10. [6] Heb. viii. 10.

though my Saviour had said, "Ye *shall* abide in my love, for *that is unchangeable;* but ye can by no means abide in my love except ye keep my commandments. Now *ye* are not able to do this: therefore, behold, I, even I, will write them in your hearts, and copy them out in your lives. Freely then approach my throne of grace, and ask me for this promise; and as ye cannot so much as ask *without me,* behold, I have promised to pour out upon you the Spirit of grace and supplications, who shall abide with you forever, teaching you both what to pray for, and how to pray."[1] In short, I believe the heart of every redeemed sinner will enter deeply into the feeling which burns within mine while I say, Thank God, that the promises are not yea and amen *in me,* a miserable, weak, and sinful worm, incapable of performing one single condition of them; but they are all yea and amen to me *in Christ Jesus. For his sake,* God will make them all good to me; yes, for his sake *they are mine already.* They are my own inheritance, once forfeited by sin, but now redeemed with the precious blood of Christ; my purchased possession, which can never cease to be mine till the price that was paid down for it ceases to be precious in the Father's sight. They are the sure and steadfast anchor of my soul; the joy and rejoicing of my heart; the song which enlivens this house of my pilgrimage; better to me than life, dearer than my necessary food; sweeter than honey and the honeycomb; more precious than fine gold;

[1] Zech. xii. 10; Rom. viii. 26.

purer than silver purified seven times. When my soul pants after any of these most sweet and tender unsealings of God's love, I will not, I cannot, go to him and say, Lord, give me those promises because I have performed the conditions of them, and am therefore *worthy* that thou shouldest give them to me. God forbid that I should take such a plea within my lips, for in so doing my own heart would condemn me, and God, who is greater than my heart, would condemn me. No: when I draw near to my reconciled God and Father, I will fill my mouth with far other arguments than these. I will say to him, Lord, thou knowest that *I* have *not* performed the conditions of these promises, but JEHOVAH *my righteousness has fulfilled them all for me.* I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies; but worthy is the Lamb that was slain; and for his dear sake thou wilt give me the best and greatest of them all; and that exceeding abundantly above all that I can ask or think.

Every condition necessary to salvation is fulfilled in us, not by any efforts of our own, but by our receiving continually grace for grace, out of the fulness of Jesus. Repentance is necessary, but we cannot repent of ourselves; and therefore Jesus is exalted to give repentance.[1] It behoves us not only to repent of, but to *forsake*, sin; but sooner shall the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, than we shall do good, who are accustomed to do evil; and therefore *Jesus* is sent to bless us, "in turning away every one of us from our iniquities."[2]

[1] Acts v. 31. [2] Acts iii. 26.

Faith is a necessary condition of salvation: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."[1] "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life; he that believeth not shall not see life."[2] Yet this same faith is the "gift of God."[3] It is "given to us on the behalf of Christ, to believe."[4] "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."[5] *Love* is no less necessary than faith. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema maran-atha."[6] But "the carnal or natural mind is enmity against God."[7] And how then can it act so directly against its own nature as to *love* him? It is not only *indifferent,* not merely *slightly* opposed, but *in its very nature absolute enmity against God.* "Nor can it be subject to the law of God;"[8] for the fulfilling of that law is love. Miserably hopeless then is our case, if that heart, which is thus defined "enmity against God," must so overcome the moral incapacity of its own nature as to fill itself with love to him. But *Jesus* has reconciled us who were alienated and enemies in our own minds by wicked works; and *for his sake* "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us."[9] *Good works* are absolutely necessary to salvation: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit."[10] "Faith without works is dead: I will show thee my faith by my works."[11]

[1] Acts xvi. 31. [2] John vi. 47; iii. 36. [3] Ephes. ii. 8.
[4] Phil. i. 29. [5] 1 Cor. xii. 3; Matt. xvi. 17.
[6] 1 Cor. xvi. 22. [7] Rom. viii. 7. [8] Rom. viii. 7.
[9] Col. i. 21; Rom. v. 5; 1 Tim. i. 14. [10] John xv. 8.
[11] James ii. 19 20.

But it has been already urged, that as the corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so neither can we who are evil do good things. "Therefore the children of God are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."[1] True it is, that we are commanded to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;" but the reason follows—"for it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure."[2] I have used the word condition in this place, for the more convenient exposition of my meaning; but I consider the use of it, as applied to *us*, to be altogether incorrect. Faith, love, holiness, &c. were indeed, to *Christ*, *conditions* of our salvation; but to us they are the *consequences* of salvation; or rather they are *a part* of our salvation, purchased for us by the obedience and atonement of Jesus Christ, "who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."[3]

We find then in ourselves an utter poverty of every thing that is spiritually good; "but God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus."[4] We are nothing, can do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, but what is evil. "Christ is all and in all." "Every good and every perfect gift cometh from above," and is given to us by the

[1] Ephes. ii. 10.

[2] Phil. ii. 12, 13; Isa. xxvi. 12; Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

[3] Titus ii. 14.

[4] Ephes. i. 3.

Father, for his beloved Son's sake. "We are complete in him."[1]

I may seem to have often repeated the words "gifts" and "given;" but they cannot come over too often, nor be too earnestly dwelt on. The Scriptures are perpetually renewing the delightful repetition, and presenting the idea of somewhat gratuitously bestowed, under every possible variety of language and imagery. Sometimes they speak of buying the gospel blessings, and tell us to "come and buy without money and without price."[2] And what is this, but to come and hold out the empty hand of faith and receive as a free gift all that God will put into it? Sometimes they represent sin under the idea of a *vast debt*, expressly declaring that "Jesus frankly forgives all when we have nothing to pay."[3] So long then as we think we have *any thing to pay*, we do not come under the description of those to whom Jesus frankly forgives all. But when convinced of our depravity and helplessness, we come poor, naked, and empty to Jesus, casting from us all confidence, save only that which his tender love and mercy excites, making mention of *his righteousness*, and *his only*, then, and not till then, will he freely pardon, freely clothe and enrich us, freely receive us among the children, and make us perfect through his own comeliness, which he puts upon the souls that simply trust in him. The poor and needy, the weak and helpless, are his peculiar

[1] Col. iii. 11; James i. 17; Col. ii. 10.

[2] Isaiah lv. 1. [3] Matt. xviii. 27.

care, while those who think they have any strength or riches of their own to trust to, are not objects of his bounty, for "he feedeth the strong with judgment,"[1] and "sendeth the rich empty away."[2]

If any of the promises are conditional, those which are expressed in the form of a covenant must be of that description, since the very word implies a compact or agreement. Let us then inquire into the terms of that covenant which God has condescended to make with his people.

We know the *first* covenant between God and man, *how that was kept;* and if man, as he came out of the hands of his Creator, upright, innocent, and holy, could not keep conditions which he knew to be holy, just, and good, how shall fallen man, "in whom dwelleth no good thing," keep any conditions fit for a holy God to propose? I have heard it said, "By sincere, though imperfect obedience:" both which terms, applied in this sense, appear to me absolute nonsense. For, in the first place, is it not blaspheming the holiness and justice of God to suppose that he "who cannot behold iniquity" will be satisfied with an *imperfect* obedience? That he will let go a little of his holiness, and a little of his justice, and part altogether with his attribute of truth? For *he has said,* That whosoever performs not the *whole* law, is guilty of *all;* and that "he will by no means clear the guilty."[3] In the next place, how can *we,* whose hearts are deceitful above all things and des-

[1] Ezek. xxxiv. 15. [2] Luke i. 53.

[3] Isaiah ii. 10; Exodus xxxiv. 7.

perately wicked,[1] talk of *sincere* obedience? We must have the deceitful heart taken away, and new hearts created within us, before we can render a sincere obedience; and then it will be no longer our own obedience. To express myself more clearly—"works done *before* justification have the nature of sin, and cannot so much as make us meet to receive grace" (Art. 9): these therefore must be wholly out of the question, in any covenant, by which we think to merit God's favour. "Works done *after* justification," though miserably imperfect, "yet have something of the nature of sincere obedience:" but to call these the cause, either *directly* or *indirectly*, of our justification, when they cannot by any means be produced till *after* justification; this would be in the most preposterous manner to confound the *cause* with the *effect*, and to put the last *first*. Justification is the *producing cause;* works done *after* justification are the *natural effect*. Let me correct myself. The free love of God in Christ is *the sole cause* both of justification and sanctification; but he has so ordered it that the one shall *always follow* the other in a fixed and inseparable connection; and to say that good works *precede* or *occasion* justification, is to say that the fruit on the tree was there before ever the tree was planted: nay, that had not the fruit first blossomed and ripened, the tree had never come there at all: it is, in fact, to say that the fruit planted the tree.

Let us cease then from attempting, in whole or in part, to stand before God upon that covenant of

[1] Jeremiah xvii. 9.

works which our father Adam, with all the advantages of a sinless nature, did not keep. Far other are the means of acceptance which the Scriptures point out to us. They tell us that Jesus, "the second Adam—the mediator of the new covenant," has taken upon himself, as our surety, to perform all the conditions annexed to it. He has borne all the penalties due to our disobedience, and has wrought out for us an obedience, so perfect, that the eye of God himself can perceive no flaw in it; so infinitely meritorious, that those poor sinners who have it on, appear in the sight of the Father "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing:" they are all fair—there is no spot in them.[1] Place now our *sincerest* obedience by the side of the righteousness of Jesus. Compare our faint desires which expire in the utterance; our tardy wishes which linger in the performance; our few specious actions whose fair outside is a cloak to much that is selfish in the motives of them, and much that is perverse in the will. Compare this righteousness with the righteousness of Jesus; of Him who "made it his meat and drink to do his Father's will;" whose zeal for the house of God "consumed him;" who did always such things as pleased God; who "knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" who "was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," and himself made higher than the heavens.[2] Oh! who would appear before God in his own filthy and ragged garments,

[1] Ephes. v. 27; Cant. iv. 7.

[2] John ix. 34; Psalm lxix. 9; Heb. vii. 26.

when he might be arrayed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness? Why—why cling any longer to the idea of our own works, as the means of winning God's favour? Do we not see that this covering is narrower than "that a man may wrap himself in it"? that it is not the covering of God's Spirit? and above all I would ask—why mix what God hath forever put asunder? Is not the righteousness of Jesus sufficiently meritorious, that it must be helped out with our righteousness? If it be a *perfect righteousness*, what need of trying to *improve* it by tacking to it some paltry mixture of our own fancied deservings! This is the folly of man—of that vain worm who would be wiser than his Maker.

I cannot forbear mentioning in this place the notable methods which some who call themselves serious Christians, have hit upon to eke out that perfect righteousness which they think to be insufficient, but which God has judged to be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. There are some who look upon the merits of Christ as given merely to *supply what is lacking* in their own *sincere* obedience; these would cut such pieces out of the beautiful garment as would serve to patch up their own filthy rags; forgetting that even the soldiers, who crucified Christ, refused to part his garment when they observed that it was without seam, woven from the top throughout. Others again profess to trust in Christ's righteousness, but talk, I know not what, of *deserving* by their own obedience that this righteousness may be applied to them. These would put on the "spotless robe;" but

Christ must accept their own righteousness as a kind of equivalent or compensation for it. A third sort feel that they cannot do without Christ's righteousness; but then it is *not enough—they* must also do *their* part; and when they have done this, they think that God will accept them: not for the sake of theirs alone—for that would be presumption, nor for the sake of Christ's alone—for that would be licentiousness; but in some way or other for the sake of the two together. These truly would adorn the "glorious dress" with their own faded tinsel picked from the dunghill. They would make it more acceptable in God's sight by sewing on to it their own filthy rags. It is not so with those who have learned the truth "as it is in Jesus." They desire with St. Paul "to be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ—the righteousness which is of God by faith."[1] They know that Jesus has "made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness:"[2] by which all the promises of the new covenant are made as sure to believers as the justice and faithfulness, the oath and counsel of God can make them. Wonder not that the ministers of Christ should be exceedingly jealous on this point; for this is the wedding garment, without which whoso dares to appear before God shall be bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness.

But to return to the promises of the covenant: for, at the risk of apparent repetition, I am desirous of

[1] Phil. iii. 9. [2] Daniel ix. 24.

setting this most important subject in a clear point of view;—so far from holiness being made the *condition* of our obtaining them, it is itself *the great promise* insured to us by that covenant: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."[1] "This is the covenant that I will make with them—I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."[2]

The character, by which the spirit of truth designates fallen men, is that of "covenant-breakers."[3] "They," *like men*, "have transgressed the covenant."[4] Isaiah says, "The earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant."[5] What then is the everlasting covenant? And how are we "covenant-breakers" to derive any benefit from it? Are the *terms* of the *everlasting* covenant changed since God entered into covenant with Adam as the representative of the whole human race? Has the holy God ceased to stand upon a perfect obedience? Will he accept less at our hands than he would at those of our father Adam? Has he reversed the decree, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"? No—the terms of the *everlasting* covenant remain unchanged. God still requires a sinless obedience, a righteousness without a flaw. Moreover, his justice demands satisfaction for his broken

[1] Jer. xxxii. 40. [2] Jer. xxxi. 33. See, also, Heb. viii. 10; x. 16.
[3] Rom. i. 31. [4] Hosea vi. 7. [5] Isaiah xxiv. 31.

covenant. We can fulfil neither the one nor the other of these requirements. But behold the second Adam—who is the Lord from heaven! With him God hath established his covenant, as the representative of a remnant chosen according to the election of grace. Jesus is the mediator and the surety of a better covenant than that which was made with Adam, or the typical covenant made with Moses. And yet the terms of the covenants are the same—perfect obedience; death in case of disobedience. But the death has been borne by Him "who died that we might live." The obedience has been fulfilled by Him "through whose obedience many were made righteous." Jesus, as the surety of the everlasting covenant, has both paid the full penalty incurred by his people for the breach of the old covenant, and has likewise performed for them every condition of the new. "He was made sin for us." We are "made the righteousness of God in him." Thus, in the second Adam, we have paid to the uttermost farthing both the debt of satisfaction and the debt of obedience. In our surety Jesus we have "received at the Lord's hand double for all our sins." In our surety Jesus we have worked out our title to eternal life: we become rightful heirs of the promises. Thus God has made with his people "an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things, and sure;" and this covenant is "all their salvation, and all their desire." Moreover, this covenant, which was confirmed of God in Christ before the world was, cannot be disannulled by the covenant of works

made with Adam *since* the creation of the world, nor by the law, which was added nearly 3000 years afterwards. It is delightful to trace this covenant from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures of truth, as it was faintly revealed to Adam and Noah; more clearly set forth to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; typified in every part of the ceremonial law, and foretold by the lawgiver Moses; as it was sung by David, prophesied by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest of the prophets; manifested and fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus; and explained and enforced by the Apostle Paul and others of the holy apostles. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"—for his free and complete salvation! for, if it were not *freely* given, we could *never* attain to it; and, if it were not *complete without our help*, we should be but *half* saved. Surely this of all others is that "gift which is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: which way soever it turneth, it prospereth."[1]

The great question then about the promises seems to be, not so much whether they are *conditional*, as whether God looks to *Christ*, or to *us*, for the *performance* of those conditions. If to Christ, the burden is laid upon "one that is *mighty:*" if to *us*, then we are undone; "for the condition of man after the fall is such, that he *cannot turn and prepare himself*, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable

[1] Proverbs xvii. 10.

to God, without the grace of God by *Christ preventing us*, that we may have a *good will, working in us when we have that good will.*" (Art. 10.) So then "we are accounted righteous before God, only *for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works and deservings:* wherefore, that we are justified *by faith only*, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as is more largely expressed in the Homily on Justification." (Art. 11.)

We now come to the second argument.—Grace will be given to all who diligently seek for it. But if we attend to the Scripture account of every man, woman, and child by nature, we shall find that this seeking also is the *effect following upon grace received: not the cause producing it.* By this I mean to say that the very act of *seeking grace* proves that *we have received grace already;* and that the very ability to seek is itself the *free gift* of God's sovereign grace. If every thought of man's heart *is evil*, and that *continually*, surely it is not out of that heart that the first desire of any good thing can spring. If, by nature, there is *none that seeketh after God*, whence can the first attempt to seek him arise but from free grace drawing us *contrary to nature?* Freely must grace be given, to enable us to seek at first; and freely must it be continued, to enable us to go on seeking. I know that *none shall seek the Lord in vain; none* who *come* shall be cast out; *none* who *believe* shall come short of everlasting life; *none* who *choose the better part* shall have it taken from them:

but then *none can seek the Lord, unless he first seek them.*[1] *None can come except it be given them of the Father*; *none can believe* save as many as are *ordained* to eternal life; *none can choose Christ* except he *first choose them.*[2] If again we consider the magnitude of the change which must take place in every sinner's heart before he can truly and earnestly seek God, we shall be convinced that no part of it is properly his own. He must "be born again;"[3] he must "become a new creature; *old* things must pass away, all things must become *new;*"[4] he must "pass from death unto life;"[5] "from darkness to light—from the power of Satan unto God;"[6]—"from going about to establish his own righteousness, to submit himself to the righteousness of God;"[7] and this, to a proud carnal heart, is the most difficult of all. And who is sufficient for these things? Who but he that first formed us in the womb, can cause us to be born again of the Spirit? Who but he that originally created us, is able to create us anew in Christ Jesus? Who but the giver of natural life can give spiritual life, "and quicken those that were dead in trespasses and sins"?[8]

When the Lord of life stood by the grave of Lazarus, and said, Lazarus, come forth, and he that was dead instantly came forth; who would say that this act of lifting himself up was the cause of his

[1] John x. 16; Ezekiel xxxiv. 4; Luke xix. 10; Psalm cxix. 176; Ephesians ii. 13. [2] John vi. 65; xv. 16; Acts xiii. 48. [3] John iii. 3. [4] 2 Cor. v. 17. [5] 1 John iii. 14. [6] Acts xxvi. 11; 1 Peter ii. 9. [7] Rom. x. 3. [8] Eph. ii. 1.

coming to life, and not rather that his coming to life was the cause of his being able to lift himself up? It is thus when Jesus by his word and Spirit says to the heart of a sinner, "Awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."[1] Instantly that dead soul arises, and its first act is seeking, or prayer; but this same act of seeking is the *effect* of spiritual life, not the *cause*. We pray *because we are alive, not that we may live*. We cannot quicken ourselves when dead in sin, any more than we can bring a dead body to life. But when *Jesus* has quickened us, we shall as surely perform all those actions which demonstrate the soul to be spiritually alive, as a dead body when raised by divine power will surely perform all the functions of a living person. Grace, great grace, must be infused, to enable us to seek at all, and He who first gave grace to seek, will give *more* grace in answer to that seeking, thus fulfilling that precious scripture which saith, "To him that hath shall be given."[2] We neither *begin* nor *carry on* the work of grace in our own hearts. Jesus is the *author* and *finisher*, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, of our faith. From the first spark of grace that faintly glimmers upon us here, to the full blaze of glory which shall burst upon us in heaven, *all, all, is his doing;* it is *he* that made us alive (spiritually), not we ourselves. It is God who both *begins* the good work in us, and also will "perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."[3]

I cannot quit this subject without adverting to the

[1] Eph. v. 14. [2] Matt. xiii. 12. [3] Phil. i. 6.

very strong words in which the Episcopal Church insists upon it throughout the whole service, perpetually reminding us that from God all holy desires, as well as good counsels, and all just works, do proceed. In the Collect for Sexagesima Sunday: "O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do." But we *are* putting our trust in something we do, if we are trusting to obtain God's promises on any conditions of our own performing; and we are again uttering a solemn mockery in the second Collect in Lent, "Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves." In the Collect for Easter-day, we acknowledge that it is God who "by his special grace preventing us, doth put into our minds good desires, and that we need his continual help to bring the same to good effect." In the 4th Sunday after Easter: "Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise." In the 5th: "Grant that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same." In the 1st after Trinity: "Because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace." In the 3d after Trinity: "We, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray." In the 9th after Trinity: "Grant to us the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we who cannot do any thing that is good with-

out thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will." In the 13th after Trinity: "Almighty and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service," &c. It appears to me that this collect is a peculiarly beautiful lesson; it so strongly sets forth the doctrine of which I am speaking, and so wisely guards it from abuse, acknowledging in the plainest terms that as we cannot obtain the promises *by* a holy life, so neither can we obtain them without it. In the 17th after Trinity we pray that "his grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to good works." In the 19th: "O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee." In the 25th: "Stir up, we beseech thee," &c. But I will not take up more time in multiplying testimonies from this most evangelical service. If these do not prove that our great reformers at least thought us utterly incapable of doing one thing acceptable in the sight of God, except by his free grace first of all putting the desire into our hearts, then enabling us to breathe out that desire in fervent prayer, and then fulfilling the desire and prayer of its own inspiring: if they do not mean that the work of salvation in the heart is the work of *free* and *sovereign mercy*, from beginning to end, I am at a loss to conceive what they *do* mean, or why they came there at all.

It is absolutely necessary to a clear and full view of this doctrine, that we ascribe to the *free, sovereign* and *unmerited* grace of God the first desire after

him that ever arose in our hearts, as well as the fulfilling of that desire when expressed in prayer. We must be convinced that *nothing* in the work of salvation is *our own*, but only the gift of God's love to us in Christ Jesus. Christ died for us when we were enemies:[1] the benefits of his death are applied to us *for the purpose* of reconciling us, not in consequence of *our* making any advances towards being reconciled. He died for the *ungodly*, for those who were *without strength;*[2] without strength to come to him; without strength to form so much as a wish to come to him. The *desire* to come is *given for his sake:* the *ability* to come is given *for his sake:* the *acceptance on coming* is an acceptance *for the beloved sake of this beloved Saviour*, "without whom we can do nothing."[3] Those who say, "Grace will be given if we ask, but then asking must *precede* or *procure* the given grace," are in effect robbing God of much of the glory due unto his name. For the power and the inclination to ask are of themselves a part of the free gift of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus. They are the beginning of God's work in the heart; and to say that we begin this work, is no other than to say that we can create ourselves anew in Christ Jesus. I will venture to affirm that if God *waited* to give us his grace till we ask him for it of our own accord, we should go without it to all eternity.

The great source of error on this head, even among serious people, is that they cannot bring themselves to think they have *nothing of their own*

[1] Rom. v. 10. [2] Rom. v. 6. [3] John xv. 5.

in the work of salvation. Therefore it is, that when constrained to acknowledge that the grace given them *when* they seek, is from God only, their self-righteousness betakes itself to another stronghold; and we find them laying claim to their *asking* and *seeking*, as if *that* at least was the effort of their own will, the spontaneous act of their own power. This is just as if one should take a dead person by the hand, breathe life into him, and lift him up upon his feet, and that person should make a show of acknowledgment to his benefactor, by allowing to that benefactor the praise of lifting him up *after* he was alive, and keeping him alive ever since, and yet should maintain that *the first breath of all* came into him by his own spontaneous act, by the effect of his own unassisted power. The absurdity of such an assertion, with regard to temporal life, would strike us at once; but we are not so struck with it in reference to spiritual life; and the reason is this. When we talk of a dead carcass, we know what we are talking about. There it lies before our eyes, incapable of breathing, moving, speaking. We perfectly know what we mean when we say that a dead *body* cannot raise itself to life. But when we speak of a *soul* dead in trespasses and sins, we too often use the phrase merely because we find it in the Scriptures, without the slightest conception of the awful reality expressed by it. Nor is it till we have ourselves in some measure passed from death unto life, that we begin to perceive the dreadful and close analogy which really exists between the two states of natural

and spiritual death. If God were to come to an unconverted person with the question, not, Can these dry bones, but, Can these dead souls live? he would be apt to reply, Why not? What should hinder them from raising themselves up and breathing the breath of spiritual life? But when God has quickened us from our own death in trespasses and sins, our eyes are opened to see what spiritual death really is, and then we learn with trembling awe to reply, "Lord, thou knowest." This is thy work, it is thou that must make us alive, and not we ourselves.

Since, then, men are universally disposed to go about establishing their own righteousness, how carefully ought we to close up every avenue through which this besetting sin might gain admittance and rob us of our peace, by leading us to rob Christ of his praise! Many are the windings of our own treacherous hearts; many are the devices of Satan by which he would tempt us to ascribe to our own strength what God has done for us of his mere mercy. Nor let us think that a mistake here can be of trifling importance. God is very jealous for his great name; and he has declared that if "we will not lay it to heart to give glory to his name," he will send a curse upon us, and will even "curse our blessings."[1] Many and glorious are the crowns which adorn the sacred head of Immanuel; let us not try to pluck thence the brightest and fairest of them all, for well does it become this King of kings. When we get to heaven, and receive the crown of glory,

[1] Malachi ii. 2.

we shall be ready enough to cast *that* at his feet, and to say, Thou *only* art worthy. Let us do the same with the crown of grace here; for surely we have as little right to arrogate the one to ourselves as the other.

A few words on a sentiment, not, it is to be hoped, very generally prevalent, yet as we do find, even in what is called the religious world, some who avowedly profess it, and many more who are secretly, perhaps unconsciously, influenced by it, a brief notice of it may not be unnecessary. I allude to those who, finding the doctrine of free and sovereign grace very fully and strongly set forth in St. Paul's epistles, seem in all their arguments on the subject to abate somewhat of the divine authority of these epistles, and confine themselves to a few isolated statements from the gospel, &c. which they deem more consonant to their own views and feelings. To such I would say, St. Paul is no more responsible for the matter contained in his epistles than you or I are. These are not, in fact, *St. Paul's epistles:* they are the epistles of *God the Holy Ghost*, faithfully transcribed and delivered to us by his servant Paul. The Holy Ghost, speaking through the medium of Paul, cannot but speak in perfect unison with what he has declared through the medium of Peter or John, or any other of his inspired messengers. He may take up one instrument and lay down another, but the Spirit which speaks in them is the same. He may open the mouth of one of his servants to explain one mystery of his gospel, while he makes

another more fully to dwell upon and unfold some other mystery: for he divideth unto every man severally as he will. But still the Spirit of the Lord is *One*. He cannot contradict himself, cannot speak contrary to the truth, for he is the Spirit of Truth, and is given to lead us into all truth. And of the inspired penmen, one and all, we may say, "Have *they* any power at all to say any thing? *The word that God put into their mouths, that have they spoken.* They *could* not go beyond the word of the Lord their God, *to say less or more.*"

We shall never become perfectly reconciled to all parts of the word of God until he himself bestows on us the spirit and temper of a little child, to receive without murmuring, or disputings, or carnal reasonings, whatsoever *JEHOVAH the Spirit* is pleased to say to us. That Spirit alone can take away the evil heart of unbelief, which prevents us from embracing the *whole* counsel of God as revealed in his word. It is he that must open our hearts to attend to *all* the things written in his law. *Then* we shall perceive a connection and a harmony between every part and every doctrine of the Scriptures, which will fill us with ever-increasing wonder and delight. May he thus open our understandings to understand the Scriptures, and to know the things that are *freely given to us of God.*

CHAPTER III.

ON ELECTING GRACE.

The 17th Article of the Episcopal Church gives so much better an account of the doctrine of Election, or Predestination, than could be expressed by any words of mine, that I beg leave to place it at the head of this chapter.

"Predestination to life is the *everlasting purpose* of God, whereby (*before the foundations of the world were laid*) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath *chosen in Christ out of mankind*, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be *called*, according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season; they *through grace obey the calling:* they be *justified freely*, they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

"As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ *is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort* to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit of

Christ mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things as well *because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ,* as because it doth *fervently kindle their love towards God;* so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into recklessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

"Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture; and in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared to us in the word of God."

The latter part of this article is awfully true; and the warning conveyed by it should sink into every heart. But what then? Must godly persons renounce or suppress a doctrine clearly revealed in Scripture; strongly enforced by the articles of a church of which they are professed members; and *full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort,* merely because curious and carnal persons will "wrest it, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction"?[1] At this rate, we must renounce every Scripture truth; for there is not one which, while it is a savour of life unto life unto them that are saved, is not also a savour of death unto death to them

[1] 2 Peter iii. 16.

that perish.[1] Therefore we must not be afraid to receive with humility and simplicity *all* that the Scriptures have revealed to us on this subject. Let us then, as in a former chapter, search this sacred word, and see what testimony we can bring from the three that bear record in heaven.

God the Father saith of himself, by Moses, "that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," and "will have compassion on whom he will have compassion."[2] God the Son has told us "that none can know the Father, save he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him:"[3] "that to some it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to others it is not given:"[4] "that no man can come to him except it were given him of the Father:"[5] "that all whom the Father giveth him, shall come to him:"[6] "that he will give eternal life to as many as God hath given him:"[7] "that of all which the Father hath given him he will lose nothing, but will raise it up again at the last day;"[8] "that many are called, but few chosen:"[9] "that God hath an elect people, whom he hath chosen:"[10] "that he will avenge his own elect:"[11] "that it is impossible finally to deceive his elect:"[12] "that he will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other:"[13] "that he calleth his own sheep by

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[1] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. [2] Exod. xxxiii. 19; Rom. ix. 5.
[3] Matt. x. 27. [4] Matt. xiii. 11. [5] John vi. 65.
[6] John vi. 37. [7] John xvii. 2. [8] John vi. 39.
[9] Matt. xx. 16; xxii. 14. [10] Mark xiii. 20.
[11] Luke xviii. 7. [12] Matt. xxiv. 24. [13] Matt. xxiv. 31.

name,[1] and leadeth them out from sin and self, and will bring his other sheep which are yet unborn, and they shall hear his voice, and that if any believe not, it is because they are not of his sheep:"[2] that "we did not choose him, but he hath chosen us, and ordained us, that we should go and bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain:"[3] "that he knows whom he hath chosen:"[4] and that "his disciples are not of the world, because he hath chosen them out of the world:"[5] declares by the pen of St. Luke, that "the Lord added to the church such as should be saved—and that as many as are ordained to eternal life believe:"[6] by that of Peter, that "all God's people are elect by the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;" that they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light;" that "the God of all grace is he who hath called them into his eternal glory by Jesus Christ:"[7] by James, that "God of his own will begetteth them with the word of truth," and that "known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world:"[8] (and if *all*, surely that most wondrous work which is wrought every time God changes a sinner's heart:) by Jude, that "the saints are sanctified by

[1] John x. 3. [2] John x. 3, 16, 26. [3] John xv. 16.
[4] John xiii. 18. [5] John xv. 19. [6] Acts ii. 47; xiii. 48.
[7] 1 Peter i. 2; ii. 9; v. 10. [8] James i. 18; Acts xv. 18.

God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:"[1] by the disciple whom Jesus loved, that "they are born again, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God:" that they are "called, and chosen, and faithful; that their names are written in the book of life, from the foundation of the world; that if we love God it is because he first loved us."[2] But of all his faithful messengers, God the Holy Ghost hath made choice more especially of St. Paul to dilate upon and unfold a doctrine which might yet have been learnt from other apostles had the writings of St. Paul never existed; a very small part of whose testimony is as follows:—"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren: moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."[3] "Wherefore there is a remnant according to the election of grace; and if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work."[4]

How plainly does the Lord the Spirit here testify the utter impossibility of mixing grace and works! He shows us that if the very least mixture of work

[1] Jude 1.

[2] John i. 13; Rev. xvii. 8, 14; xiii. 8; xx. 12, 15; xxi. 27; Luke x. 20; 1 John iv. 10. See, also, John xii. 39, 40.

[3] Rom. viii. 29, 30.

[4] Rom. xi. 5, 6.

could be admitted into the covenant, grace would change its nature, and cease to be grace. It must be *all work or all grace;* we cannot make a half-and-half covenant with God. He has offered us these two; we must be saved by the one,[1] or perish by the other.[2] "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."[3] "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Jesus Christ before the world began."[4] Time would fail me before I had done bringing forward Scripture testimonies to the doctrine of election; it is so interwoven with every part of Holy Writ that it is difficult to take any part separately without impairing its effect. I will, therefore, only remark, in conclusion, that our Lord uses the term *chosen* or *elect* no

[1] Ephes. ii. 8. [2] Gal. iii. 10. [3] Ephes. i. 3–6, 11.
[4] 2 Tim. i. 9. See, also, Rom. ix.; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Gal. iv. 6; 1 Thess. ii. 12; iv. 7; 2 Thess. i. 11, 12; ii. 13, 14; 2 Tim. ii. 19; Titus i. 1–3.

less than ten times in this sense in the New Testament,—viz., Matt. xx. 16; xxii. 14; xxiv. 31; Mark xiii. 20, 22, 27; Luke xviii. 7; John xiii. 18; xv. 16, 19; that it is of frequent occurrence in the writings of the prophets and apostles; and that the word predestinate is used several times by the Apostle Paul. It appears to me also impossible to read the Gospel of St. John, or the Acts of the Apostles, through, without perceiving that this doctrine runs like a rich vein through every passage. But, while we are bound to embrace *all that the Scriptures teach* on this subject, we must cautiously guard against attempting to be wise *above what is written*, and we should do well to confine ourselves not only to the sense, but as much as possible to the *very words*, of Scripture, lest we should darken counsel by words without knowledge. Yet we must neither reject any part of the written *word of God*, nor try to twist and turn it so as to make it square with our own notions. *As it stands, so* we must receive it; with meekness of love, without partiality, without gainsaying.

Many are firmly persuaded of the truth of this doctrine, who yet shrink from declaring their conviction to others; as if some dangerous effect were to be apprehended from its propagation. The folly of such an apprehension is well pointed out in the following words of an eminent reformer, which I cannot forbear giving, as they afford a specimen of the dignified simplicity, sound judgment, and close reasoning which shine in almost every part of the

Institutes of Calvin; a book which was held in repute as the finest apology for Protestantism that ever appeared, till the names of Calvin and Calvinist came to be held up as mere signs of a party in religion. "The Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing necessary and useful to be known is omitted, so nothing is taught which it is not beneficial to know. Whatever, therefore, is declared in the Scripture concerning *predestination*, we must be cautious not to withhold from the faithful, lest we appear either to defraud them of the favour of their God, or to reprove and censure the Holy Spirit for publishing what it would be useful by any means to suppress. Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his heart and his ears to all the discourses addressed to him by God; only with this moderation, that as soon as the Lord closes His sacred mouth he shall also desist from further inquiry. This will be the best barrier of sobriety, if in learning we not only follow the leadings of God, but, as soon as he ceases to teach, we give up our desire of learning." "I only desire this general admission, that we should neither scrutinize those things which the Scriptures have left concealed, nor reject those which are openly exhibited. For it is judiciously remarked by Augustine that we may safely follow the Scripture, which proceeds like a mother stooping to the weaknesses of a child, that it may not leave our weak capacities behind. But persons who are so cautious or timid as to wish predestination to be buried in silence lest feeble minds

should be disturbed, with what pretext, I ask, will they gloss over their arrogance, which indirectly charges God with foolish inadvertency, as though he foresaw not the danger which they suppose they have the penetration to discover? Whoever, therefore, endeavours to raise prejudices against the doctrine of predestination, openly reproaches God, as though something had inconsiderately escaped him that is pernicious to his church."

I have been induced to give this extract at some length, because I never met with so beautiful a description of the sober spirit in which the doctrine of election, and, indeed, every other doctrine, ought to be studied; and also because it shows the extreme folly of shutting our eyes against any revealed truth, for fear of its consequences. If "the man of God" would be "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," he must study with humble diligence, and receive with ready teachableness, every part of the revealed will of God. "For all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."[1]

And thus it is, that, while the doctrine of predestination is death to those who weary themselves in presumptuous disputings and reasonings about it, there always have been and will be a happy few, who, humbly and sincerely feeding upon it, receiving all that the Scripture tells them concerning it, and desiring to know no further, find it health and peace

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

to their souls. It lays them very low at the feet of their Redeemer; brings down the high swelling of their pride and self-esteem; pulls away from under them all those broken reeds upon which they had been used to lean, self-righteousness, self-will, self-dependence, and leaves to them no one prop on which to lean for support, whilst coming up out of this wilderness, but the arm of their beloved,—that everlasting arm which will surely conduct them to glory. When that arm becomes shortened that it cannot save, or weak that it cannot support; when the arm of Jesus fails and is weary; then they will begin to look around for some other stay; but not till then. Or when they can discover in themselves one single good thing which Jesus did not put there; one reason why he should visit them with such amazing love; then they will conclude that his love took its rise from theirs, not theirs from his. But they never will discover one such thing, so long as the Spirit of God illumines their heart and brings to light its immense depravity and worthlessness. Therefore, as God's love could not have been excited by any thing in them, they believe it to be an eternal love; that they were called in time, because they were chosen from eternity; and that the name of Jesus is now engraven as a seal upon their hearts, because their names were written on his heart before ever the world was. And when their thoughts stretch forward to the end of this pilgrimage, and they rejoice in the view of the mansions prepared for them in their Father's house, the crown of that

rejoicing is this: "we got not the land in possession by our own strength, neither did our own arm save us, but thy right hand, and thy arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us."[1] "Thus they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;" for "God is the glory of their strength, and in his favour their horn is exalted."

I cannot pretend to meet the objections or to refute the cavils commonly raised when this doctrine of election is made the subject of discussion; for I did not learn it in the way of carnal reasonings, but by simply taking the Scriptures as I found them, and as the Spirit of God enabled me to receive them. If St. Paul, after descanting on this subject, breaks off in an ecstasy of admiration, exclaiming, "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" we need not wonder if our shallow understandings are incapable of fathoming, our limited capacities of comprehending, our low minds of reaching, them. We must be satisfied with believing that it is even so, because "so it seemed good in our Father's sight,"[2] whatever it may appear in ours. This reason, which appeared satisfactory to our Saviour, may surely satisfy us; or, if not, he has vouchsafed an assurance, which may well serve to repress present inquiry into things too high for us. "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."[3]

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[1] Psalm xliv. 3. [2] Matt. xi. 26. [3] John xiii. 7.

That these things are so, I believe, because I find them among the revealed things which belong to us and our children forever. How or why they are so, I desire not too closely to inquire, lest I should intrude into the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. Oh that he would give unto every one of us that humble and teachable spirit with which a little ignorant child is content to receive his father's lessons, without rudely commenting upon his father's ways or rashly intruding into his father's secrets! This one thing we know, and with this we may be satisfied: that the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. But it were preposterous to expect that he should always do that which is right in our eyes, so long as our notions of right and wrong are so utterly confused and perverted as they have been ever since the fall. He himself tells us that the Lord seeth not as man seeth; and that "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."[1] It cannot be, so long as his ways are equal and ours unequal, that his righteous dealings should be in exact accordance with our unrighteous views and sentiments. Instead, then, of wearying ourselves with impotent attempts to bring down his will and counsel to the level of our ideas, our far wiser way will be, to submit our thoughts and ideas to his will, assured that it is holy, just, and good. Yet, since we should be ready to give a reason for every hope that is in us, I will venture to

[1] Luke xvi. 15.

touch on some of the most hackneyed objections to this glorious doctrine; and I pray God that he will help me to show their exceeding vanity and futility.

The objection most frequently urged against the doctrine of predestination is, that it seems to charge the Almighty with injustice and caprice; for if the doom of every person be irrevocably fixed before he comes into the world, why is he punished for what he cannot help? And is it not accusing God of a strange partiality, to suppose him capable of rejecting some and choosing others, before they had done any thing to draw down his wrath or to conciliate his favour? Now, to this objection, as involving the honour of his own name, God himself has deigned to provide us with a sufficient answer. "Thou wilt then say unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory?"[1]

The justice of God in predestination would appear sufficiently clear, if we would but take a fair and

[1] Rom. ix. 19, 23; Job xxxii. 12, 13, 23; xl. 2, 8; Isaiah xlv. 9.

impartial view of our own state by nature: that this world is a *guilty* and *ruined* world; and that every creature born into it has a sinful nature born with him, which lays him under the just and dreadful sentence of eternal death. Now, if God foreknew from all eternity that the children of men would thus become the children of wrath, and determined from all eternity to save a remnant according to the election of grace, where is the injustice of this proceeding? Is it that he did *not* determine to save *all*, instead of *some* only? But, alas! that *all* are *not* saved, is a truth of which even the opposers of election must acknowledge their sad conviction. It is that he was influenced entirely by free and distinguishing grace, that he chose the favoured remnant *according to his counsel and will;* and not on account of any merit of theirs in seeking or in serving him. But where is the distinction of merit to be found? It exists nowhere but in the distempered imagination of men. This merit, which men talk about, God cannot find; and he has nowhere acknowledged its existence. For there is no difference; "for all have sinned:" "all the world is guilty before God." We know that "the whole world lieth in wickedness."[1] It appears, then, that whether we uphold or oppose the doctrine of predestination, we must agree in acknowledging that *all* men are *not saved.* And if this be the case,—if God have determined to save *some* from wrath, and if, for reasons to us inscrutable, he have determined *not* to save *all*,—by what motive,

[1] Rom. iii. 19, 22, 23; 1 John i. 10.

I ask, could his choice be directed where *all are equally guilty;* ALL, like sheep, have gone astray? where none can repent or turn to him, unless he gives the grace to do so? and what is that but choosing them? Reason itself tells us that the Scripture account of this mystery can alone be the true one,—viz., "that God has mercy on *whom he will* have mercy;" "that he has compassion on *whom he will* have compassion." That "it is *not* of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of *God that showeth mercy.*" That God begets us of *his own will.* That the saints are *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God. That they are *predestinated* unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself: *according to the good pleasure of his will:* "being *predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" Thus much we *know,* because thus much is *revealed* to us in the oracles of truth. But at this point we must stay our inquiries. For we are as incapable of entering into the reasons of God's dealing with us, any further than he has deigned to unfold them, as an infant is to enter into the counsels of a full-grown man. Yes; and a great deal more so. For the one is but the difference between finite and finite—between worm and worm; but this is the difference between finite and infinite—between the worm and God.

The case, plainly stated, appears to be this. *All are sinners.* Not only so, but *all love* sin, and drink up iniquity like water. *All* say in their hearts to

God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."[1] Therefore every individual of the human race, without one single exception, is in a state of condemnation before God—a state from which he has neither the *power* nor the *will* to extricate himself. The *whole world* lieth in wickedness; it lieth under the curse, and most justly *deserveth* the curse which God has pronounced against "*every one* who continueth not in *all* things that are written in the book of the law to do them."[2] The whole, therefore, of Adam's race, considered as sinners, may be considered as, *by nature*, in a state of reprobation. But, blessed forever be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he would not display his justice in the destruction of a *whole world* of sinners. He determined to show also the riches of his glory on certain vessels of mercy, whom he had afore prepared unto glory. He chose some of those worthless and guilty things, called men, the vessels of his mercy. He chose these children of wrath to become the children of grace. He chose them in Christ Jesus long before the foundation of the world; and, ever since the foundation of the world, he has been calling those chosen vessels (as the time appointed for each came) out from this world, giving his Son to redeem and his Spirit to sanctify them, and himself to be their portion forever. Does this wonderful display of his mercy upon a part of Adam's hell-deserving race, take away his right of executing justice upon the remainder of that race? Should

[1] Job xxi. 14. [2] Gal. iii. 10.

we say, why did he not *pardon all*, when we ought to be amazed at his mercy in not having *condemned all?* It is of his mercies that we are not all consumed: well may it be asked, Who are we that we stand thus replying against God? When all are as brands *fit for the burning*, if God chose to pluck some as brands out of the fire, shall we say that this act of mercy renders less just the destruction of those who are left?

Mercy is offered to *all* (at least in Christian lands); but such is the desperate malignity of sin, such is the enmity of the heart to God, that *all*, if left to their own *free will* (as it is called), would shut their ears and hearts against every overture of reconciliation. God, by his special grace, opens the ears and hearts of a chosen remnant, to attend to and embrace the glad tidings of salvation. They come to Jesus, because the Father draws them; and because they come, he saves them to the uttermost. Does all this diminish the wickedness of those who do *not* come, or detract from God's justice in punishing them for not coming? He sends his Son to man with the largest proffers of mercy. His long-suffering endures them, spares them, waits upon them, till it has been proved to men and angels that such is the perverseness of man's *will* that he *will not* accept of life. Then he gives them over to the natural and necessary consequences of their own choice. But *all* are not thus given over; a remnant, a seed, is chosen in Christ, in whom, *to show forth his own glory*, he subdues the rebellious will, takes away

the natural enmity, and accepts them, not for their own sakes, but for Christ's.

To sum up what has been said, the condemnation of mankind is *a just and deserved* condemnation: the salvation of the remnant chosen out from mankind is a *free* and *undeserved* salvation. Every man shall have *perfect justice* done to him; and if, in the case of some, justice and mercy have met together, let no one dare to murmur, for God has a right to do what he will with his own.

If, after all these considerations, the doctrine of election still seems to imply injustice and partiality in God's dealings towards us, I would ask, is there any other scheme upon which his dealings can be made less mysterious and inexplicable? Are the difficulties which surround predestination more insurmountable than those which present themselves in every part of the providential dispensations of God? Might not the same temper which objects to the electing grace of God, carp also at his injustice and partiality in revealing to us the abundance of light and truth, while he has left so many dark places in the earth full of the habitations of cruelty? Might not such persons arraign his equity in giving to some every possible advantage of a religious education and leaving others to every possible disadvantage of an irreligious one? Or (for there are no bounds to the presumptuous spirit of inquiry) why do they not at once take the Almighty to task for having suffered evil to get into the world at all? For it is certain that evil *has* got into the world;

and its existence is, after all, the great difficulty, of which the opposers of predestination can give us no better account than the believers in this doctrine are able to do; for we know nothing but what the Scriptures have revealed to us; and if they have not gone back to the origin of evil, the reason must be, that instruction on that point was not necessary for us.

But I stop: he that reproveth God, let him answer it. All these mysteries can be accounted for only by referring them to the inscrutable mystery of God's predestination. To the eye of carnal reason they lie involved in the thickest obscurity; but the eye of faith sees in them no darkness at all. For faith, instead of vainly striving to pull these things, so far above reason, down to the level of reason, resolves every difficulty into the *gracious will* or *wise permission* of God, and *seeks to know no further.* How many things are there which I know not, nor can by any searching find out to perfection! But *Jesus knows them all.* With this assurance I sit down fully satisfied. He will teach them to me hereafter, as I am able to bear it. In the mean time I will trust, and not be afraid. All that my God says to me I will implicitly believe, for I know that every word of God is pure. "All the words of his mouth are in righteousness: there is nothing froward or perverse in them: they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge."[1] When I come to see God as he is, and to

[1] Prov. viii. 8, 9.

know as I myself am known, I shall find that all these mysteries of his word and will were only "dark with excessive light." In the mean time, till I have the eagle eye that can gaze undazzled at his glories, I will view them at humble distance through the glass of faith, which he has given me for this purpose; nor will I dare to repine because "I can only see them in a glass darkly."[1] Thus faith removes every objection, stills every murmur, and silences every doubtful thought. I have dwelt the longer upon this subject, from a conviction that the grand reason with most people for rejecting the doctrine of election, is, *not* that they *cannot find it in the Bible*, but that, being unable to reconcile it to their own *preconceived* and *imperfect* notions of equity and fitness, they come to the Bible *predetermined not to find it there.*

But another, and a heavy charge too, is brought against this doctrine: that it encourages people to continue in sin. The same charge was brought against free grace in the days of the Apostle Paul, and is answered fully in the sixth chapter of his epistle to the Romans. See, also, Rom. iii. 8, 31. It cannot be denied that there are some wretched persons who turn the grace of God into licentiousness; but *it is the grace of God* for all that, and, *as such, cannot have an unholy tendency.* We are not the less commanded to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, because some use this liberty only as an occasion to the flesh, only for a cloak of

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

maliciousness. Such persons would suck poison and death from the very tree of life. But *real* believers in the doctrine of election, I mean those who derive their ideas on it *from the Bible only*, and measure every thing by this standard, have not so learned Christ. *They* know that "God hath not called them to uncleanness, but to holiness."[1] They know that "whom God foreknew, he also did predestinate *to be conformed to the image of his Son;*"[2] and therefore they search themselves daily, to see whether this pure, this holy image be forming in their hearts. They know that if God "chose them before the foundation of the world," it was "that they might be *holy and without blame before him in love;*"[3] and therefore they are encouraged to be importunate with him for more of that holy, blameless, and loving temper to which he has chosen them. Thus they have "the witness in themselves:"[4] they have "the earnest of the Spirit:"[5] they know that they are sons, "because God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into their hearts:"[6] they know God's love to them by their love to him. They look upon their own good works as the *fruit* of God's electing love —*not as the root from whence it sprang;* and, far from considering them as *any part of the payment* of their mighty debt, they receive them as a fresh load of obligation, for which they will still be owing him more and more to all eternity. Yet they know full well that good works are necessary as the *evidences*

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 7. [2] Rom. viii. 29. [3] Ephes. i. 4.
[4] 1 John v. 10. [5] 2 Cor. i. 22; v. 5. [6] Gal. iv. 6.

of their election; for how can they tell that Christ abideth in them except by the spirit which he has given them? In proportion, then, as they find their hearts panting after holiness, in that very proportion they are enabled to maintain the sweet assurance that God has chosen them to be partakers of his holiness. Thus they give all diligence to make their calling and election sure: that is, *not to make God sure* whether he *will* elect and call them, but *to make themselves sure* whether God *has* elected and called them.

Nearly allied to this objection is one raised by many against the doctrine of election, that it either lifts men up with an overweening arrogance and presumption, or else causes them to sink into the depths of despair. But when a poor sinful creature feels his heart running over with sorrow for sin, and desires after holiness; when his soul, once taken up with the world, is now absorbed in the love of Jesus, so as to desire nothing besides him in heaven or in earth: whether is it more arrogant to say, *I turned myself* from sin unto God, or to say, *God of his infinite mercy turned me?* To say, *I myself* sought God out and chose him, *and therefore* he accepted me; or to say, God sought *me* out because he had chosen me in Christ Jesus before the world began, and *therefore* I am now enabled to seek and choose him? And as every redeemed sinner knows that the love he feels in his heart to God was none of his own implanting, for all that *he* could produce was only *enmity and more enmity*, is it so very presump-

tuous to conclude that he loves God because God *first* loved him? Rather, would it not be the height of presumption to contradict Scripture and common sense, by making the opposite conclusion? And if we allow the truth of St. John's assertion, that if *we* love God it is because he *first* loved us, whence shall we date the *commencement* of this love? Was it some sudden impulse that came into his mind *unawares and unforeknown*, as human imaginations arise? Did it begin at our birth, or spring up at the moment of our conversion? What! could not *Omniscience foreknow* the objects of his love? Must he wait till the work of his own hands is brought upon the stage of existence, before he can tell how it will turn out? or whether he is making a vessel to honour, or one to dishonour? a vessel of mercy, or a vessel of wrath? Will those who charge believers in election with arrogance, explain how they themselves, without the greatest arrogance, can assert that *Omniscience* cannot, or will not, *foresee*, and that Omnipotence cannot, or will not, *decide*, the fate of *his own creatures?* For, if we love God because he *first* loved us, and if this love of his *was not from all eternity*, then there must be a time when he did *not* love us: that is, there must have been a time when either the mind of the *unchangeable God* was *different* from what it is now, or else a time when the *almighty and all-knowing God* could not *foresee* the objects of his favour, or *was unable to make up his mind* whether he would love them or not. The difficulties which absurdities like these present on

every side, are far greater, and consequently far more dangerous, than those which attend the plain Bible truth, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy," and that the saints were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. As long as I have the Bible in my hand, I cannot think the thoughts and counsels of the Eternal are the mere creatures of a day, the offspring of time and chance, veering about with every change of our most changeable hearts. I must conclude that, like their Supreme Author, they *stretch from eternity to eternity;* and it is only the belief that they were thus *from everlasting*, that emboldens me to hope that they will stand firm *to everlasting.* Again, is it more arrogant to say that God's love to us took its origin from any good thing *perceived* or *foreseen* in us, or to say that every good thing that ever has appeared or shall appear in us, takes its origin from this infinite, this eternal, this incomprehensible love of God? I desire indeed no other account of the connection subsisting between God's love to me, and mine to him, than that which he has himself vouchsafed to give: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."[1]

How can a doctrine be said to encourage presumption and arrogance, which strips off every pretension to assist in saving ourselves, and sends us naked, empty, and helpless to the cross of Christ, leaving us no plea except his free unmerited grace

[1] Jer. xxxi. 3.

and mercy? What more humbling than a doctrine which is perpetually reminding us, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" and, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"[1] But the great charge against believers in predestination seems to be that they think *themselves* predestined to salvation, and adjudge all the rest of the world to eternal misery. God forbid! they dare not take upon themselves to judge others; yea, they judge not their own selves, except by that unerring word which God has given them for this purpose (of course I only speak of sincere Christians; false professors will pervert this, as well as every other doctrine). It is true that many happy souls are enabled to triumph in full assurance of faith, and to say, with St. Paul, "Who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*."[2] But these, as I have before said, venture to think themselves the elect people of God, only because they find the *character* of God's elect deeply engraven on their hearts. "They cry unto him night and day."[3] They *love much*, whence arises a sure and well-founded hope that *much has been forgiven them.* But this very circumstance forbids them to despair of others. Set before them the vilest, the most hardened sinner, such a one as the righteous and moral of this world would separate from their company, and they would say, "But for the free mercy of my God, I had been as vile as he. Never was there a darker, or a

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [2] Gal. ii. 20. [3] Luke xviii. 7.

colder, or a harder heart, than mine was by nature. If then God has shined into my dark heart, made my cold heart to burn with love, melted my heart into a willing obedience, why may I not hope that he will do the same for this poor sinner before me? Divine grace has not yet called him, but it may do so this very day: nay, who knows but God may have appointed me to be the happy, humble instrument of his conversion? Therefore I will use every means, though it may seem as hopeless as Ezekiel's preaching to the dry bones. I will plant and water; for, though *I cannot* command an increase, *God can*.[1] In the morning I will sow my seed, and in the evening I will not withhold my hand; for I know not which means shall prosper, this or that, or whether my God will bless both alike."[2]

Thus, far from causing us to despair of the salvation of others, or to be careless in using every means of doing them good, this belief in God's electing love is the only thing that can set us to work with any rational hope of success. For if the changing of a sinner's heart depend upon our own exertions, or upon his disposition to benefit by our persuasion, the task of addressing him will be a hopeless and a thankless one indeed. But if God have *from the beginning chosen* that sinner unto salvation (and we have no right to infer otherwise), he has also appointed the *means* whereby this salvation shall be effected, and those means *shall be blessed*, though every human probability be against them. Let not

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. [2] Eccl. xi. 6.

then a doctrine be denounced as uncharitable which excites its followers to be always abounding in every labour of love, by the certain assurance it affords them that their labour shall not be vain in the Lord. It must not be denied that they *are* afraid to give flattering titles, or to appear to think well of the spiritual condition of those in whom, as yet, they can perceive none of the things which accompany salvation. To be thus saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, is what the world calls being very kind and charitable; but the Bible calls it "hating our brother in our heart."[1] This charity, so highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God. But that love, which the Holy Ghost sheds abroad in the hearts of his people, constrains them to overstep the narrow bounds of worldly kindness and courtesy. It causes rivers of waters to run down their eyes, for those who keep not God's law. And while they weep and pray for them, they dare not but tell them of their danger. But do they urge them to despair? Far, far from it. To despair indeed of help from themselves, from every thing short of Jesus Christ; but not to despair of his willingness to receive and pardon them! They tell sinners that his arms are wide open to embrace all who come to him, and they lift up their prayers unto God, that he would make them come to Jesus. They tell them that he is able to save to the uttermost; that with him there is plenteous redemption; that he waits to be gracious. Yes, they beseech

[1] Lev. xix. 17.

them in Christ's name to be reconciled to God. Nor do they beseech the less fervently because they know that the grace of God alone can give effect to their persuasions. Not the less earnestly do they assure sinners that there is mercy for them, if they will but lay hold on it; grace for them, if they will but ask for it; grace to pardon all their sins, and to subdue them; but not grace to pardon sin without subduing it: this they dare not say; and therefore it is, that the very same persons who charge them with holding doctrines which tend to encourage sin, will often, by a strange inconsistency, accuse them of unnecessary strictness and moroseness in decrying the innocent pleasures of the world. As if the pleasures of a world lying in wickedness could be altogether innocent; or as if they could afford any real enjoyment to a soul which daily quenches its thirst at a fountain of delights which the world knows not of,—a soul possessing spiritual tastes and desires: in short, "which is not of the world, even as Jesus was not of the world."[1]

We now come to the remaining part of the above-mentioned charge against election, viz., that it drives people to despair. A wrong and carnal view of it may; but a right and spiritual reception of it is the surest preservative against despair. For if God is to love us for something in ourselves, sure I am that he will never love us at all; for in us dwelleth no good thing. But if he loves us according to his own good will and pleasure, then is our eternal happiness

[1] John xvii. 16.

secure. Again, if we come to Jesus of ourselves, I see no reason to hope that we shall endure unto the end. The frailty and inconsistency of our nature render it more than probable that we shall again go away from him. And thus this everlasting love, if it depend on our conduct, must vary according to our changeable affections; and that Jesus, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, may love us *one* day and cast us off the next; may be disposed this day to say to us, "Come, ye blessed of my Father," and the very next day may frown us from his presence with, "Depart, ye cursed." Is not this discouraging? On the other hand, if we come to Jesus, because the Father hath given us to Jesus and himself draws us to Jesus, then we may be assured that he will hold us fast to the end; for he who is the truth has declared that, "of all whom the Father hath given him he will not lose one, but will raise them up again at the last day."[1]

When any one feels his heart drawn in strong desires after God, what can be more contrary to despair than a doctrine which teaches him to believe that he never could have been thus drawn unless God had loved him with an everlasting love? If, indeed, believers in election professed to pry into the secrets of futurity, to open the Lamb's book of life and tell which names are written there, and which are blotted thence, such unwarrantable presumption would lead to the most frightful consequences. But, on the contrary, they well know that they cannot

[1] John vi. 39.

say of the vilest sinner, This man is not a chosen vessel unto the Lord; therefore they hope against hope, and, strong in faith, giving glory to God, they go on, regardless of every discouragement, inviting sinners to come to him, and assuring them that "whosoever will, may come and take of the water of life freely."[1]

Feebly as I have handled this intensely interesting subject, I trust I have said enough to prove that the doctrine of predestination, if we cleave simply to the Scripture statement concerning it, does not draw after it all the train of evils which have been represented as its necessary consequences; that it involves no injustice on the part of God; that it neither drives men into licentiousness, presumption, uncharitableness, nor despair. On the contrary, that a simple reception of it tends to stop every cavil against God's justice, affords the strongest incentives to holiness and self-abasement, and is rather fitted to fill the bosom with the sweetest hope, than to render it the gloomy abode of despair.

But supposing even that no satisfactory answer could be found to these and other objections, still it is our duty as believers in the Bible ever to bear in mind that the most plausible objections against a doctrine do by no means amount to a refutation of its truth. For "the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man," and even those who are in some degree spiritual must often feel that they are but "fools, and slow of heart to understand"

[1] Rev. xxii. 17.

the deep counsels of God. The real question, then, for our consideration, as believers in the truth of God's word, is not, whether a doctrine be liable to this or that objection, but whether it be, or be not, clearly revealed in that word. If it be not a part of the will of God revealed to us in the Scriptures, then must it be utterly abhorred and rejected, though an angel from heaven were to preach it to us. But if the doctrine be plainly laid down and strongly insisted on in the Bible, what signify objections and dreaded consequences? All that is in God's word we are bound to receive and teach, without fear of consequences. The truths which God has not scrupled to reveal, we need not scruple to embrace; nay, we must embrace them with meekness and affection, as a part of that engrafted word which is able to save our souls. We may safely leave the consequences to him. He is abundantly able without our help to provide against any evil results that may ensue from a doctrine of his own revealing. Let us not seek to be wiser than God.

To conclude: we contend not for the doctrine of election, as held by this or that particular sect, or even as handed down to us in the strong and beautiful language of the reformers, but simply and solely as it is set forth in the very words of the oracles of God, that is, in the words of God himself. We cannot be too careful to expound our views of this doctrine in the very words, as well as according to the exact sense, of Scripture: then, if any differ, and would convince us of error, they

must find some other Scriptures, in which the truths contained in ours are omitted. For let it be remembered that as long as we keep close to the Bible we are not answerable for the objections that may be made against the Bible. If the doctrine can be proved to be there, that ought abundantly to suffice for the conviction of those who believe that all Scripture was written by the inspiration of God. When God speaks, man's part is to submit, not to object. To oppose or deny any thing that is revealed in God's word, is to make God a liar. To cavil or murmur at it, is to rebel against God. To be ashamed or afraid of it, is to call in question the goodness and wisdom of God in revealing it. To receive it as little children, and humbly pray for light to understand it, is the way to become wise unto salvation. Let those who profess to believe the Bible, instead of wearying themselves with carnal reasonings for and against the doctrine of predestination, meekly consult their Bibles, and see whether the doctrine be there or not. And may the Spirit of truth lead them into the saving knowledge of this and every other truth, for his mercies' sake in Christ Jesus!

It was my intention to have concluded this little treatise with a few words on the final perseverance of God's elect; but this doctrine is so clearly implied in that of predestination, that it seems unnecessary to dwell on it very largely. For it is impossible to conceive that God will cast off in time those whom he has chosen from eternity. Perseverance is a

necessary consequence of predestination, and accordingly we find that the Scriptures generally mention them in connection with, and in dependence on, each other. It is thus clearly expressed in John vi. 37, 39, 44, 65: "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me *draw him;* except it were given him of my Father. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.* This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that *of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*" Again, John xv. 16: "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,* that ye should go and bring forth fruit:" here is election; "and that *your fruit should remain:*" here is perseverance. "Moreover, whom he did *predestinate,* them he also *called;* and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."[1] So, then, if there be truth in God's word, those who are predestinated are in every instance, without exception, *called, justified, and finally glorified;* and this could not be, if they did not persevere to the last; for he only that "*endureth to the end* shall be saved."[2] Indeed, how absurd, how impossible, it is to separate these two truths! For if the saints are thus elect according to the foreknowledge of God, and if they are yet subject to fall away, and perish at the last, then is the foreknowledge of God subject to fail, and his predestination or purpose from all eternity to be frustrated.

We may therefore comfort our souls in the full

[1] Romans viii. 30. [2] Matt. x. 22.

assurance "that *faithful* is he that calleth us, who also will do it." That "God is faithful, by whom we were called into the fellowship of his Son." "Being confident of this very thing, that *he which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; will confirm us unto the end,* that we may be blameless in the day of Jesus Christ;" for "*he* hath declared that he will never leave nor forsake us;" and that "he will put his fear in our hearts, that *we shall not depart from him.*"[1] Since, therefore, the connection between these two doctrines is so close and intimate that it is impossible to adopt the first of them without embracing the other, we must account for every apparent final falling away after the reception of God's grace, as the beloved apostle has instructed us to do. "They went out from us, *but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would* NO DOUBT *have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*"[2] Jesus giveth unto his sheep "eternal life; and *they shall never perish*; neither shall any man pluck them out of his hands."[3] If then any person, after *appearing* to believe, finally die in a state of unbelief, the reason is evident; it is because they *are not, never were,* of Christ's sheep; even as Christ himself hath told us.[4] "Fear not, little flock, for *it is your Father's good pleasure* to give you the kingdom."[5] But if a wolf

[1] 1 Thess. v. 24; 1 Cor. i. 9; 1 Cor. i. 8; Heb. xiii. 5; Jer. xxxii. 40, which compare with Heb. viii. 8, 10, 11.

[2] 1 John ii. 19. [3] John x. 28. [4] John x. 26. [5] Luke xii. 32.

in sheep's clothing get among the flock, it does not follow that *he* shall inherit the kingdom, nor is his coming short of it a falling away of God's elect; but only a proof that, in spite of his specious appearance, he never belonged to them. Such a one's falling away is no falling from grace, but only a return to his natural propensities, "as the dog returns to his own vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."[1] And thus it is whenever professors *finally* fall. Their specious outside was such, perhaps, as to deceive not only themselves, but even the very elect; but it could not deceive God. The Lord *knoweth* them that are his. The good shepherd knows his sheep, and his piercing eye will find out every intruder and drive them from the fold. God is not mocked. This man was *all along* sowing to the flesh; and *therefore* it is that he is finally left of the flesh to reap corruption.[2]

If we carefully examine the passages which are supposed to militate against this doctrine, we shall find that not one of them is really opposed to it; because not one of them supposes the apostate ever to have been endued with saving grace. A comparison of Heb. vi. 4–8, with the parable of the sower, may convince us that the fallers-away there mentioned are only very aggravated cases of the stony and thorny ground hearers of the parable. It is to be remarked that St. Paul does not compare them to earth which having once drank in the rain from heaven, and brought forth good fruit, became after-

[1] 2 Peter ii. 22. [2] Gal. vi. 8.

wards barren and unfruitful; but he compares them to that which, unsoftened by the rain from heaven which falls upon it, brings forth nothing but thorns and briers, as its natural and sole production. Such earth is not good ground become bad: it is bad ground which has never been made good. And it receives the curse of barrenness. The barren fig-tree is spared from year to year, till the heavenly husbandman has digged about it and dressed it: yet we are told that if it continue barren under all these advantages, a time will come when even Jesus will consent that it be cut down: when even Jesus, coming to the fig-tree and beholding *no fruit*, but *only leaves*, will say, in his wrath, "*Let no fruit grow on this tree henceforward forever.*" So this ungrateful soil, on which the rain from heaven has been perpetually falling, but on which it has ever fallen in vain, shall at length be left to the consequences of its own obduracy, and no further pains bestowed upon it. And thus it was with the apostate professors of whom St. Paul speaks. These had tasted the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost; that is, partakers of his miraculous influences through the laying on of the hands of the apostles (for that no participation of his saving influences is here spoken of is evident from the 9th verse). They had "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come;" that is, "they had heard the word, and anon with joy received it."[1] Yet all this while they had none of those "things

[1] Matt. xiii. 20.

which accompany salvation."[1] Their hearts were all the time like the stony ground in which the good seed takes no root; or like the ground whence the thorns and briers have never been cleared, and which must inevitably choke the good seed and make it unfruitful. Therefore, says St. Paul to such false-hearted professors, *let them beware.* For after they have tried God's patience to a certain extent, his Spirit will no longer strive with them. They are as sure to fall away, as a plant that has no root is sure to wither. And when God thus permits them to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and they are left to crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame, then it will be impossible for any efforts of ours to renew them to repentance; for those whom God thus leaves to themselves, will go on hardening themselves forever. That this is the sense of his words, is evident from the context, Heb. vi. 1–4, the meaning of which seems to be, it is of no use to be perpetually laying the foundation of your faith, and going back to the first rudiments of the doctrine of Christ, for the sake of those way-side, stony-ground, or thorny-ground hearers, in whom the good seed will never come to perfection. Let us therefore leave the first principles, and go on to perfection, for their sakes who, having received the word, and understood it, are now prepared to receive further supplies of light and knowledge; who, having in them the things which accompany salvation, will go on from strength to strength.

[1] Heb. vi. 9.

One thing has especially struck me in this and similar passages. Amidst all the gifts and graces mentioned, *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* is never once hinted at as having formed any part of the religion of these false-hearted professors. Yet a simple trust in Jesus is the grand evidence of our being in a state of grace. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life."[1] Now, should these pages meet the eye of one of my dear Christian brethren whose mind, from the weakness of his faith, or the strength of temptation, may be harassed by passages such as these, it is to this point of a *simple belief in Jesus* that I would particularly draw his attention.

The sense of your weakness and helplessness fills you with dismay. You often feel that, like one of the saints of old, you are ready to halt; your feet seem almost gone, your steps about to slide. The candle of the Lord has ceased to shine upon you, and you exclaim, in your haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes. You look, perhaps, for gifts and graces, as evidences of your spiritual condition; but you feel that you have none to produce. Perhaps you have been a backslider from the ways of God, and have gone on frowardly in the way of your own heart. And now all, all seems gone, save a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which, having set yourself down as the adversary of the Lord, you are daily expecting to devour you. But,

[1] John iii. 36.

beloved, though in the agony of your self-abasement and condemnation you cannot find a single spiritual grace residing within you, can you not recollect a time *when your faith laid hold on Jesus for salvation?* when, putting away all confidence in your own deservings, and casting yourself, as a miserable, guilty, and helpless sinner, at the foot of his cross, you trusted yourself unreservedly to him for pardon, righteousness, and strength? If you have thus done, you have placed yourself in the hands of One who will hold you fast to all eternity. *He* will never let *you* go, though your weak and treacherous heart may sometimes seem to have let go its hold of him. Take comfort, then, and encourage yourself in the Lord your God. Be assured that the false professors, to whom you would compare yourself, *never had one grain of this saving faith.* Though your faith be weak and trembling, yet be not afraid; *only believe.* For look what comfortable words our Saviour Christ speaks unto you: "This is the will of him that sent me; that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and *I will raise him up at the last day.*"[1]

If you cannot feel sure that you have ever exercised this simple, unreserved trust in your Lord and Saviour, endeavour now to commit yourself into his hands. Instead of tormenting yourself with so many vain fears, cast yourself *anew* on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, as if you had never been to him before. Fall, just as you are, into the arms of his

[1] John vi. 40.

mercy. Say unto him, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief." If you can do nothing more, lie passive at his feet until his pitying eye shall look down upon you and his gentle hand shall raise you from the dust. Trust in him, though he slay you. *Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, *and thou shalt be saved.*

There is another passage in Hebrews (x. 26–29) which is sometimes brought forward to prove that we may fall away after having received the knowledge of the truth. But this knowledge is evidently no *saving* knowledge. We may receive the *knowledge of the truth* without receiving and embracing the truth *itself.* The plain meaning of the passage seems to be, that to those who sit under the light of the gospel without benefiting by it, to them it shall be a savour of death unto death; that if, when Christ has been offered and his sacrifice made known to us, we reject that means of salvation, there remaineth no further sacrifice for sin, "no other name under heaven by which we can be saved."[1] If we will not be reconciled through Christ, God has provided no other way of reconciliation.

Neither has the passage Heb. xii. 15–17 any real difficulty in it. For Esau's rejection of his birthright was but the natural effect of his carelessness of the heavenly blessings contained in it. He had never really valued his birthright; it was as a pearl cast before swine, which he readily relinquished for the food suited to his swinish nature. Moreover, it

[1] Acts iv. 12.

did but serve to justify God's predestination concerning him; for he had declared, before even Esau was born, that the elder should serve the younger. Esau's case, therefore, was not one of apostasy; but his conduct, in this instance, was only a consequence of his former obduracy.[1]

Nor does the dreadful description in 2 Peter ii. 20, 21, allude to a falling away from grace once received. For grace had never cleansed those polluted hearts. The earthly, sensual, devilish nature had never been in the smallest degree removed. This affords no instance of sheep permitted to stray everlastingly from the fold; for *these*, we are informed, were but dogs returned to their own vomit —swine, that had been outwardly washed, to their wallowing in the mire.

In Luke xi. 21, 22, we are told that "when a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh away all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoil;" that is, that Satan keeps undisturbed possession of man's heart, till Christ, who is stronger than he, forcibly ejects him thence, and himself enters into that soul, and dwells and reigns there forever. In the 24th, 25th, and 26th verses of the same chapter, the unclean spirit is represented as voluntarily going

[1] It should be remembered, also, that the "*repentance*" referred to a change of mind in Isaac, not in himself: compare verse 17 with Gen. xxvii. 35–40. The example has, therefore, no direct connection with spiritual apostasy.

out of a man, and afterwards returning with seven other spirits more wicked than himself; so that the last state of that man is worse than the first. The former of these passages may serve to explain and illustrate the latter, which has sometimes been supposed to describe a state of apostasy after grace. In the first instance (*that of real conversion*), the strong man armed *keepeth* his palace, and is only driven out by the coming of "one stronger than he," who, having possessed himself of the palace, will hold fast his blood-bought possession. Satan can never resume his dominion; because, let him come when he will to that man's heart, he finds it occupied by "a stronger than himself," who will never let him set his foot there. In other words, when Christ really takes up his abode in a soul, Satan's power over it is gone forever. He can no longer say, "I will return to *my house* whence I came out;" for he knows that the house is now *Christ's house*, and must remain so till Satan is stronger than Christ. But the second case described is widely different. Here the unclean spirit has secure possession of the soul; he goes in and comes out at his pleasure. He has no need to keep his palace so carefully, because he sees no one to oppose his right and title to it. He leaves the man for a time; and, when weary of his absence, he says, "I will return to my house whence I came out." And mark the circumstance of his return: he findeth it "empty, swept, and garnished."[1] Some of its outward abomi-

[1] Matt. xii. 44.

nations have been cleared away during his absence: it has been swept with the broom of self-righteousness, and garnished with some fancied good works —some carnal desire or other for obtaining God's favour. But where is the "stronger than the strong man"? Who shall keep the unclean spirit out of an empty house? What wonder if, finding it thus empty, and none to oppose his entrance, he go in and dwell there with seven other spirits more wicked than himself? To divest the subject of metaphor, the soul of this man, left for a time by Satan and subjected to some self-devised purification, may seem to himself and others to be "washed from his filthiness;"[1] may be adorned with a specious appearance of grace. But there is *no Christ* in that soul, and therefore there never can really have been any grace. The doors of that heart have never been lifted up to let the King of glory in. The man is of himself wholly without strength to resist the attack of his spiritual adversary; and as he has never applied for help to "one that is mighty," what wonder if Satan lead him captive at his will? This is not, then, the case of a soul which, *having received Christ*, has fallen away from him, but of one who has *never received Christ at all.* St. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that *Jesus Christ is in you*, except ye be reprobates?" Now, Jesus Christ was not in this man; therefore his state, at the time of the return of the evil spirit, was not

[1] Prov. xxx. 12.

that of the elect of God; nor need his fall be an occasion of stumbling to any who know that Christ abideth in them by the Spirit which he hath given them.

The true use of the awful passages which we have been considering, is to stir up every professing disciple of the Lord Jesus carefully to examine the state of his own soul. For these scriptures show us how far—how very far—a person may proceed in an apparently religious course, without having any of those things that *accompany salvation*. Let us not try ourselves by any uncertain standard. Strong convictions, highly-excited feelings, fair appearances of our conduct, may exist, while all the time we have neither part nor lot in the matter, because our hearts are not right in the sight of God. But "hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."[1] "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit."[2] "And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."[3] "We know that we have passed from death unto life; because we love the brethren."[4] "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."[5] We are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."[6] Has God given us this faith? Have we "a living

[1] John ii. 3. [2] 1 John iv. 13. [3] Gal. v. 22, 23.
[4] 1 John iii. 14. [5] 2 Tim. ii. 19. [6] 1 Peter i. 5.

faith"?[1] Does it enable us to endure "as seeing him who is invisible"?[2] To "look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal"?[3] Does it "work by love," "overcome the world," quench the fiery darts of the devil?[4]

These are some of the marks which God has given us to examine ourselves by. These are things which do accompany salvation. "Every plant," says Jesus, "which my heavenly Father *hath not planted,* shall be rooted up."[5] Would *we* know whether we are thus planted only to be rooted up, or whether we are "trees of righteousness, *the planting of the Lord,*"[6] "which shall still bring forth fruit in old age, and shall, to the end, be fat and flourishing"?[7] Let us examine whether we be *filled with the fruits of righteousness which are, by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*[8]

I would, in conclusion, most earnestly beseech all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, not to dishonour their Lord by doubting of his faithfulness to keep them to the end. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."[9] If he loved us yesterday, he loves us to-day, and he will love us forever; and, as long as his love to us lasts, so long will ours to him; for ours is the effect of his. As long as he loves us with an everlasting love, so long

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[1] James ii. 26. [2] Heb. xi. 27. [3] 2 Cor. iv. 18.
[4] Gal. v. 6; John v. 4; Eph. vi. 16. [5] Matt. xv. 13.
[6] Isa. lxi. 3. [7] Psalm xcii. 14. [8] Phil. i. 11.
[9] Heb. xiii. 8.

with loving-kindness will he draw us; and, as long as he draws us, we shall run after him. Let us not stagger at the promises of God, through unbelief; but let us be strong in faith, giving glory to God,—glory to the love which first brought us out of our low estate, glory to the faithfulness which will never leave us till it has perfected that which concerns us. And when we are assaulted by foes within and without, and hemmed in by so many dangers that we are ready to exclaim, "I shall one day perish by the hand of the enemy," even then let us against hope believe in hope, that the Lord shall deliver us from every evil work, and will preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom.[1]

Let the weak and trembling believer look well to every part of the everlasting covenant, and lay hold of the strong consolation contained in it. Let him remember who are the parties in this covenant,—the trinity in unity on the one hand, and the man Christ Jesus, who is also Jehovah Jesus, appearing on behalf of the children of the covenant, on the other. For the saints are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:"[2] they are admitted into the outward pale of the covenant (by the sign of baptism), "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"[3] and they are made partakers of the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 18. [2] 1 Peter i. 2. [3] Matt. xxviii. 19.

Ghost."[1] According to the "counsel" and "eternal purpose" of this triune Jehovah was the everlasting covenant established; "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:"[2] "whose counsel endureth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations:"[3] "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning:"[4] "who changeth not:"[5] "who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent:"[6] "the God that cannot lie:"[7] "the Lord God of truth:"[8] "whose word is true from the beginning, and every one of his righteous judgments endureth forever:"[9] "who will be ever mindful of his covenant:"[10] for he is "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy."[11] "A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."[12] This covenant-keeping God is our Father, for he is the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," the other party in the covenant; yea, himself the Surety of the covenant of peace, our Surety for good. This Surety of ours has performed his part, that is, our part, in the everlasting covenant. He has been "cut off, but not for himself; has made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness."[13] Justice, by releasing our Surety from the prison of the grave, and permitting him forever

[1] 2 Cor. xiii. 14. [2] Eph. i. 5, 9, 11, and iii. 11.
[3] Psalm xxxiii. 11. [4] James i. 7. [5] Mal. iii. 6.
[6] Num. xxiii. 19. [7] Titus i. 2. [8] Psalm xxxi. 5.
[9] Psalm cxix. 160. [10] Psalm cxi. 5.
[11] Deut. vii. 9; 1 Kings viii. 23; Neh. i. 5; Dan. ix. 4.
[12] Deut. xxxii. 4. [13] Dan. ix. 24, 26.

to sit down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, has proclaimed herself fully satisfied, and unable to claim from him or from us one jot or one tittle more in the way either of doing or of suffering.[1] "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."[2] And he is able to "save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them:"[3] and that the Father "heareth him always."[4] He is gone "to appear in the presence of God for us;"[5] to be our advocate with the Father;[6] our "High Priest over the house of God."[7] Moreover, "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell:"[8] and "out of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."[9] "All the promises" of the covenant "in him are yea, and in him amen:"[10] for God hath declared that "his covenant shall stand fast with him."[11] "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever."[12] Thus "ordered in all things and sure"[13]

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[1] Rom. iv. 25. [2] Rom. viii. 34. [3] Heb. vii. 25.
[4] John xi. 42. [5] Heb. ix. 24. [6] 1 John ii. 1.
[7] Heb. x. 21. [8] Col. i. 19. [9] John i. 16.
[10] 2 Cor. i. 20. [11] Psalm lxxxix. 28. [12] Isa. lix. 21.
[13] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

is the everlasting covenant which God hath made with his people. It was "confirmed of God in Christ before the world was:"[1] confirmed by the promise and oath of God, those two "immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie:"[2] and, being thus confirmed, "none shall ever disannul or add to it."[3] "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David"[4] (*i.e.* David's Lord, as is evident from the context). "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that *I will not turn away from them to do them good*" (here is *God's faithfulness*), "but I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me"[5] (here is *our perseverance.*) "The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."[6] "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David:"[7] and how sure those mercies are, may be seen from Jer. xxxiii. 20, 26. "Thus hath the Lord sent redemption unto his people; he hath commanded his covenant forever; holy and reverend is his name."[8] Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts! The whole earth shall be full of thy glory! Salvation to our God which

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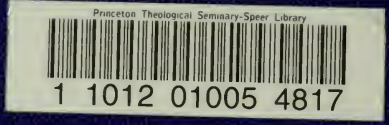
[1] Gal. iii. 17, and Eph. i. 4.
[2] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[3] Gal. iii. 15.
[4] Psalm lxxxix. 34, 35.
[5] Jer. xxxii. 40.
[6] Isa. liv. 9, 10.
[7] Isa. lv. 3.
[8] Psalm cxi. 9.

sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever!

That blessed child of the covenant, Hooker, has expressed his faith in the final perseverance of God's elect in terms so beautiful and glorious that I cannot close this little work without inserting them. "Blessed for ever and ever be that mother's child whose faith hath made him the child of God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heavens may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, and the stars their glory; but concerning the man that trusted in God, if the fire have proclaimed itself unable as much as to singe a hair of his head, if lions, beasts ravenous by nature, and keen with hunger, being set to devour, have as it were religiously adored the very flesh of the faithful man; what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him? If I be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? *Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No; I am persuaded that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall ever* prevail so far over me. *I know in whom I have believed;* I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for

me; I have a shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power; unto him I commit myself; his own finger hath engraved this sentence in the tables of my heart, *Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not:* Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep, as a jewel, unto the end; and, by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it."

THE END.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